THE AMBASSADORS

By Henry James

Volume I

Preface

Nothing is more easy than to state the subject of "The Ambassadors,"

which first appeared in twelve numbers of \_The North American Review\_

(1903) and was published as a whole the same year. The situation

involved is gathered up betimes, that is in the second chapter of

Book Fifth, for the reader's benefit, into as few words as possible--

planted or "sunk," stiffly and saliently, in the centre of the current,

almost perhaps to the obstruction of traffic. Never can a composition

of this sort have sprung straighter from a dropped grain of suggestion,

and never can that grain, developed, overgrown and smothered, have yet

lurked more in the mass as an independent particle. The whole case,

in fine, is in Lambert Strether's irrepressible outbreak to little Bilham

on the Sunday afternoon in Gloriani's garden, the candour with which he

yields, for his young friend's enlightenment, to the charming admonition

of that crisis. The idea of the tale resides indeed in the very fact

that an hour of such unprecedented ease should have been felt by him AS

a crisis, and he is at pains to express it for us as neatly as we could

desire. The remarks to which he thus gives utterance contain the essence of

"The Ambassadors," his fingers close, before he has done, round the

stem of the full-blown flower; which, after that fashion, he continues

officiously to present to us. "Live all you can; it's a mistake not to.

It doesn't so much matter what you do in particular so long as you

have your life. If you haven't had that what HAVE you had? I'm too

old--too old at any rate for what I see. What one loses one loses;

make no mistake about that. Still, we have the illusion of freedom;

therefore don't, like me to-day, be without the memory of that illusion.

I was either, at the right time, too stupid or too intelligent to have it,

and now I'm a case of reaction against the mistake. Do what you like

so long as you don't make it. For it WAS a mistake. Live, live!"

Such is the gist of Strether's appeal to the impressed youth, whom

he likes and whom he desires to befriend; the word "mistake" occurs

several times, it will be seen, in the course of his remarks--

which gives the measure of the signal warning he feels attached

to his case. He has accordingly missed too much, though perhaps

after all constitutionally qualified for a better part, and he wakes up

to it in conditions that press the spring of a terrible question.

WOULD there yet perhaps be time for reparation?--reparation, that is,

for the injury done his character; for the affront, he is quite ready to

say, so stupidly put upon it and in which he has even himself had

so clumsy a hand? The answer to which is that he now at all events SEES;

so that the business of my tale and the march of my action, not to say

the precious moral of everything, is just my demonstration of this

process of vision.

Nothing can exceed the closeness with which the whole fits again

into its germ. That had been given me bodily, as usual, by the

spoken word, for I was to take the image over exactly as I

happened to have met it. A friend had repeated to me, with great

appreciation, a thing or two said to him by a man of distinction,

much his senior, and to which a sense akin to that of Strether's

melancholy eloquence might be imputed--said as chance would have,

and so easily might, in Paris, and in a charming old garden

attached to a house of art, and on a Sunday afternoon of summer,

many persons of great interest being present. The observation

there listened to and gathered up had contained part of the "note"

that I was to recognise on the spot as to my purpose--had contained

in fact the greater part; the rest was in the place and the time

and the scene they sketched: these constituents clustered

and combined to give me further support, to give me what I may

call the note absolute. There it stands, accordingly, full in the

tideway; driven in, with hard taps, like some strong stake for the

noose of a cable, the swirl of the current roundabout it. What

amplified the hint to more than the bulk of hints in general was

the gift with it of the old Paris garden, for in that token were

sealed up values infinitely precious. There was of course the seal

to break and each item of the packet to count over and handle and

estimate; but somehow, in the light of the hint, all the elements

of a situation of the sort most to my taste were there. I could

even remember no occasion on which, so confronted, I had found it

of a livelier interest to take stock, in this fashion, of

suggested wealth. For I think, verily, that there are degrees of

merit in subjects--in spite of the fact that to treat even one of

the most ambiguous with due decency we must for the time, for the

feverish and prejudiced hour, at least figure its merit and its

dignity as POSSIBLY absolute. What it comes to, doubtless, is that

even among the supremely good--since with such alone is it one's

theory of one's honour to be concerned--there is an ideal BEAUTY

of goodness the invoked action of which is to raise the artistic

faith to its maximum. Then truly, I hold, one's theme may be said

to shine, and that of "The Ambassadors," I confess, wore this glow

for me from beginning to end. Fortunately thus I am able to

estimate this as, frankly, quite the best, "all round," of all my

productions; any failure of that justification would have made

such an extreme of complacency publicly fatuous.

I recall then in this connexion no moment of subjective

intermittence, never one of those alarms as for a suspected hollow

beneath one's feet, a felt ingratitude in the scheme adopted,

under which confidence fails and opportunity seems but to mock.

If the motive of "The Wings of the Dove," as I have noted, was to

worry me at moments by a sealing-up of its face--though without

prejudice to its again, of a sudden, fairly grimacing with

expression--so in this other business I had absolute conviction

and constant clearness to deal with; it had been a frank

proposition, the whole bunch of data, installed on my premises

like a monotony of fine weather. (The order of composition, in

these things, I may mention, was reversed by the order of

publication; the earlier written of the two books having appeared

as the later.) Even under the weight of my hero's years I could

feel my postulate firm; even under the strain of the difference

between those of Madame de Vionnet and those of Chad Newsome, a

difference liable to be denounced as shocking, I could still feel

it serene. Nothing resisted, nothing betrayed, I seem to make out,

in this full and sound sense of the matter; it shed from any side

I could turn it to the same golden glow. I rejoiced in the promise

of a hero so mature, who would give me thereby the more to bite

into--since it's only into thickened motive and accumulated

character, I think, that the painter of life bites more than a

little. My poor friend should have accumulated character,

certainly; or rather would be quite naturally and handsomely

possessed of it, in the sense that he would have, and would always

have felt he had, imagination galore, and that this yet wouldn't

have wrecked him. It was immeasurable, the opportunity to "do" a

man of imagination, for if THERE mightn't be a chance to "bite,"

where in the world might it be? This personage of course, so

enriched, wouldn't give me, for his type, imagination in

PREDOMINANCE or as his prime faculty, nor should I, in view of

other matters, have found that convenient. So particular a luxury

--some occasion, that is, for study of the high gift in SUPREME

command of a case or of a career--would still doubtless come on

the day I should be ready to pay for it; and till then might, as

from far back, remain hung up well in view and just out of reach.

The comparative case meanwhile would serve--it was only on the

minor scale that I had treated myself even to comparative cases.

I was to hasten to add however that, happy stopgaps as the minor

scale had thus yielded, the instance in hand should enjoy the

advantage of the full range of the major; since most immediately

to the point was the question of that SUPPLEMENT of situation

logically involved in our gentleman's impulse to deliver himself

in the Paris garden on the Sunday afternoon--or if not involved by

strict logic then all ideally and enchantingly implied in it. (I

say "ideally," because I need scarce mention that for development,

for expression of its maximum, my glimmering story was, at the

earliest stage, to have nipped the thread of connexion with the

possibilities of the actual reported speaker. HE remains but the

happiest of accidents; his actualities, all too definite,

precluded any range of possibilities; it had only been his

charming office to project upon that wide field of the artist's

vision--which hangs there ever in place like the white sheet

suspended for the figures of a child's magic-lantern--a more

fantastic and more moveable shadow.) No privilege of the teller of

tales and the handler of puppets is more delightful, or has more

of the suspense and the thrill of a game of difficulty

breathlessly played, than just this business of looking for the

unseen and the occult, in a scheme half-grasped, by the light or,

so to speak, by the clinging scent, of the gage already in hand.

No dreadful old pursuit of the hidden slave with bloodhounds and

the rag of association can ever, for "excitement," I judge, have

bettered it at its best. For the dramatist always, by the very law

of his genius, believes not only in a possible right issue from

the rightly-conceived tight place; he does much more than this--he

believes, irresistibly, in the necessary, the precious "tightness"

of the place (whatever the issue) on the strength of any

respectable hint. It being thus the respectable hint that I had

with such avidity picked up, what would be the story to which it

would most inevitably form the centre? It is part of the charm

attendant on such questions that the "story," with the omens true,

as I say, puts on from this stage the authenticity of concrete

existence. It then is, essentially--it begins to be, though it may

more or less obscurely lurk, so that the point is not in the least

what to make of it, but only, very delightfully and very damnably,

where to put one's hand on it.

In which truth resides surely much of the interest of that

admirable mixture for salutary application which we know as art.

Art deals with what we see, it must first contribute full-handed

that ingredient; it plucks its material, otherwise expressed, in

the garden of life--which material elsewhere grown is stale and

uneatable. But it has no sooner done this than it has to take

account of a PROCESS--from which only when it's the basest of the

servants of man, incurring ignominious dismissal with no

"character," does it, and whether under some muddled pretext of

morality or on any other, pusillanimously edge away. The process,

that of the expression, the literal squeezing-out, of value is

another affair--with which the happy luck of mere finding has

little to do. The joys of finding, at this stage, are pretty well

over; that quest of the subject as a whole by "matching," as the

ladies say at the shops, the big piece with the snippet, having

ended, we assume, with a capture. The subject is found, and if the

problem is then transferred to the ground of what to do with it

the field opens out for any amount of doing. This is precisely the

infusion that, as I submit, completes the strong mixture. It is on

the other hand the part of the business that can least be likened

to the chase with horn and hound. It's all a sedentary part--

involves as much ciphering, of sorts, as would merit the highest

salary paid to a chief accountant. Not, however, that the chief

accountant hasn't HIS gleams of bliss; for the felicity, or at

least the equilibrium of the artist's state dwells less, surely,

in the further delightful complications he can smuggle in than in

those he succeeds in keeping out. He sows his seed at the risk of

too thick a crop; wherefore yet again, like the gentlemen who

audit ledgers, he must keep his head at any price. In consequence

of all which, for the interest of the matter, I might seem here to

have my choice of narrating my "hunt" for Lambert Strether, of

describing the capture of the shadow projected by my friend's

anecdote, or of reporting on the occurrences subsequent to that

triumph. But I had probably best attempt a little to glance in

each direction; since it comes to me again and again, over this

licentious record, that one's bag of adventures, conceived or

conceivable, has been only half-emptied by the mere telling of

one's story. It depends so on what one means by that equivocal

quantity. There is the story of one's hero, and then, thanks to

the intimate connexion of things, the story of one's story itself.

I blush to confess it, but if one's a dramatist one's a dramatist,

and the latter imbroglio is liable on occasion to strike me as

really the more objective of the two.

The philosophy imputed to him in that beautiful outbreak, the hour

there, amid such happy provision, striking for him, would have

been then, on behalf of my man of imagination, to be logically

and, as the artless craft of comedy has it, "led up" to; the

probable course to such a goal, the goal of so conscious a

predicament, would have in short to be finely calculated. Where

has he come from and why has he come, what is he doing (as we

Anglo-Saxons, and we only, say, in our foredoomed clutch of exotic

aids to expression) in that galere? To answer these questions

plausibly, to answer them as under cross-examination in the

witness-box by counsel for the prosecution, in other words

satisfactorily to account for Strether and for his "peculiar

tone," was to possess myself of the entire fabric. At the same

time the clue to its whereabouts would lie in a certain principle

of probability: he wouldn't have indulged in his peculiar tone

without a reason; it would take a felt predicament or a false

position to give him so ironic an accent. One hadn't been noting

"tones" all one's life without recognising when one heard it the

voice of the false position. The dear man in the Paris garden was

then admirably and unmistakeably IN one--which was no small point

gained; what next accordingly concerned us was the determination

of THIS identity. One could only go by probabilities, but there

was the advantage that the most general of the probabilities were

virtual certainties. Possessed of our friend's nationality, to

start with, there was a general probability in his narrower

localism; which, for that matter, one had really but to keep under

the lens for an hour to see it give up its secrets. He would have

issued, our rueful worthy, from the very heart of New England--at

the heels of which matter of course a perfect train of secrets

tumbled for me into the light. They had to be sifted and sorted,

and I shall not reproduce the detail of that process; but

unmistakeably they were all there, and it was but a question,

auspiciously, of picking among them. What the "position" would

infallibly be, and why, on his hands, it had turned "false"--these

inductive steps could only be as rapid as they were distinct. I

accounted for everything--and "everything" had by this time become

the most promising quantity--by the view that he had come to Paris

in some state of mind which was literally undergoing, as a result

of new and unexpected assaults and infusions, a change almost from

hour to hour. He had come with a view that might have been figured

by a clear green liquid, say, in a neat glass phial; and the

liquid, once poured into the open cup of APPLICATION, once exposed

to the action of another air, had begun to turn from green to red,

or whatever, and might, for all he knew, be on its way to purple,

to black, to yellow. At the still wilder extremes represented

perhaps, for all he could say to the contrary, by a variability so

violent, he would at first, naturally, but have gazed in surprise

and alarm; whereby the SITUATION clearly would spring from the

play of wildness and the development of extremes. I saw in a

moment that, should this development proceed both with force and

logic, my "story" would leave nothing to be desired. There is

always, of course, for the story-teller, the irresistible

determinant and the incalculable advantage of his interest in the

story AS SUCH; it is ever, obviously, overwhelmingly, the prime

and precious thing (as other than this I have never been able to

see it); as to which what makes for it, with whatever headlong

energy, may be said to pale before the energy with which it simply

makes for itself. It rejoices, none the less, at its best, to seem

to offer itself in a light, to seem to know, and with the very

last knowledge, what it's about--liable as it yet is at moments to

be caught by us with its tongue in its cheek and absolutely no

warrant but its splendid impudence. Let us grant then that the

impudence is always there--there, so to speak, for grace and

effect and ALLURE; there, above all, because the Story is just the

spoiled child of art, and because, as we are always disappointed

when the pampered don't "play up," we like it, to that extent, to

look all its character. It probably does so, in truth, even when

we most flatter ourselves that we negotiate with it by treaty.

All of which, again, is but to say that the STEPS, for my fable,

placed themselves with a prompt and, as it were, functional

assurance--an air quite as of readiness to have dispensed with

logic had I been in fact too stupid for my clue. Never,

positively, none the less, as the links multiplied, had I felt

less stupid than for the determination of poor Strether's errand

and for the apprehension of his issue. These things continued to

fall together, as by the neat action of their own weight and form,

even while their commentator scratched his head about them; he

easily sees now that they were always well in advance of him. As

the case completed itself he had in fact, from a good way behind,

to catch up with them, breathless and a little flurried, as he

best could. THE false position, for our belated man of the world--

belated because he had endeavoured so long to escape being one,

and now at last had really to face his doom--the false position

for him, I say, was obviously to have presented himself at the

gate of that boundless menagerie primed with a moral scheme of the

most approved pattern which was yet framed to break down on any

approach to vivid facts; that is to any at all liberal

appreciation of them. There would have been of course the case of

the Strether prepared, wherever presenting himself, only to judge

and to feel meanly; but HE would have moved for me, I confess,

enveloped in no legend whatever. The actual man's note, from the

first of our seeing it struck, is the note of discrimination, just

as his drama is to become, under stress, the drama of

discrimination. It would have been his blest imagination, we have

seen, that had already helped him to discriminate; the element

that was for so much of the pleasure of my cutting thick, as I

have intimated, into his intellectual, into his moral substance.

Yet here it was, at the same time, just here, that a shade for a

moment fell across the scene.

There was the dreadful little old tradition, one of the platitudes

of the human comedy, that people's moral scheme DOES break down in

Paris; that nothing is more frequently observed; that hundreds of

thousands of more or less hypocritical or more or less cynical

persons annually visit the place for the sake of the probable

catastrophe, and that I came late in the day to work myself up

about it. There was in fine the TRIVIAL association, one of the

vulgarest in the world; but which give me pause no longer, I

think, simply because its vulgarity is so advertised. The

revolution performed by Strether under the influence of the most

interesting of great cities was to have nothing to do with any

betise of the imputably "tempted" state; he was to be thrown

forward, rather, thrown quite with violence, upon his lifelong

trick of intense reflexion: which friendly test indeed was to

bring him out, through winding passages, through alternations of

darkness and light, very much IN Paris, but with the surrounding

scene itself a minor matter, a mere symbol for more things than

had been dreamt of in the philosophy of Woollett. Another

surrounding scene would have done as well for our show could it

have represented a place in which Strether's errand was likely to

lie and his crisis to await him. The LIKELY place had the great

merit of sparing me preparations; there would have been too many

involved--not at all impossibilities, only rather worrying and

delaying difficulties--in positing elsewhere Chad Newsome's

interesting relation, his so interesting complexity of relations.

Strether's appointed stage, in fine, could be but Chad's most

luckily selected one. The young man had gone in, as they say, for

circumjacent charm; and where he would have found it, by the turn

of his mind, most "authentic," was where his earnest friend's analysis

would most find HIM; as well as where, for that matter, the former's

whole analytic faculty would be led such a wonderful dance.

"The Ambassadors" had been, all conveniently, "arranged for"; its

first appearance was from month to month, in the \_North American

Review\_ during 1903, and I had been open from far back to any

pleasant provocation for ingenuity that might reside in one's

actively adopting--so as to make it, in its way, a small compositional

law--recurrent breaks and resumptions. I had made up my mind here

regularly to exploit and enjoy these often rather rude jolts--

having found, as I believed an admirable way to it; yet every question

of form and pressure, I easily remember, paled in the light of the

major propriety, recognised as soon as really weighed; that of

employing but one centre and keeping it all within my hero's compass.

The thing was to be so much this worthy's intimate adventure that

even the projection of his consciousness upon it from beginning to end

without intermission or deviation would probably still leave a part of

its value for him, and a fortiori for ourselves, unexpressed.

I might, however, express every grain of it that there would be

room for--on condition of contriving a splendid particular economy.

Other persons in no small number were to people the scene, and each

with his or her axe to grind, his or her situation to treat, his or her

coherency not to fail of, his or her relation to my leading motive,

in a word, to establish and carry on. But Strether's sense of these

things, and Strether's only, should avail me for showing them;

I should know them but through his more or less groping knowledge

of them, since his very gropings would figure among his most interesting

motions, and a full observance of the rich rigour I speak of would

give me more of the effect I should be most "after" than all other

possible observances together. It would give me a large unity,

and that in turn would crown me with the grace to which the

enlightened story-teller will at any time, for his interest,

sacrifice if need be all other graces whatever. I refer of course

to the grace of intensity, which there are ways of signally achieving

and ways of signally missing--as we see it, all round us, helplessly

and woefully missed. Not that it isn't, on the other hand, a virtue

eminently subject to appreciation--there being no strict, no absolute

measure of it; so that one may hear it acclaimed where it has quite

escaped one's perception, and see it unnoticed where one has gratefully

hailed it. After all of which I am not sure, either, that the immense

amusement of the whole cluster of difficulties so arrayed may not operate,

for the fond fabulist, when judicious not less than fond, as his best of

determinants. That charming principle is always there, at all events,

to keep interest fresh: it is a principle, we remember, essentially

ravenous, without scruple and without mercy, appeased with no cheap

nor easy nourishment. It enjoys the costly sacrifice and rejoices

thereby in the very odour of difficulty--even as ogres, with their

"Fee-faw-fum!" rejoice in the smell of the blood of Englishmen.

Thus it was, at all events, that the ultimate, though after all so

speedy, definition of my gentleman's job--his coming out, all

solemnly appointed and deputed, to "save" Chad, and his then

finding the young man so disobligingly and, at first, so

bewilderingly not lost that a new issue altogether, in the

connexion, prodigiously faces them, which has to be dealt with in

a new light--promised as many calls on ingenuity and on the higher

branches of the compositional art as one could possibly desire.

Again and yet again, as, from book to book, I proceed with my

survey, I find no source of interest equal to this verification

after the fact, as I may call it, and the more in detail the

better, of the scheme of consistency "gone in" for. As always--

since the charm never fails--the retracing of the process from

point to point brings back the old illusion. The old intentions

bloom again and flower--in spite of all the blossoms they were to

have dropped by the way. This is the charm, as I say, of adventure

TRANSPOSED--the thrilling ups and downs, the intricate ins and

outs of the compositional problem, made after such a fashion

admirably objective, becoming the question at issue and keeping

the author's heart in his mouth. Such an element, for instance, as

his intention that Mrs. Newsome, away off with her finger on the

pulse of Massachusetts, should yet be no less intensely than

circuitously present through the whole thing, should be no less

felt as to be reckoned with than the most direct exhibition, the

finest portrayal at first hand could make her, such a sign of

artistic good faith, I say, once it's unmistakeably there, takes

on again an actuality not too much impaired by the comparative

dimness of the particular success. Cherished intention too

inevitably acts and operates, in the book, about fifty times as

little as I had fondly dreamt it might; but that scarce spoils for

me the pleasure of recognising the fifty ways in which I had

sought to provide for it. The mere charm of seeing such an idea

constituent, in its degree; the fineness of the measures taken--a

real extension, if successful, of the very terms and possibilities

of representation and figuration--such things alone were, after

this fashion, inspiring, such things alone were a gage of the

probable success of that dissimulated calculation with which the

whole effort was to square. But oh the cares begotten, none the

less, of that same "judicious" sacrifice to a particular form of

interest! One's work should have composition, because composition

alone is positive beauty; but all the while--apart from one's

inevitable consciousness too of the dire paucity of readers ever

recognising or ever missing positive beauty--how, as to the cheap

and easy, at every turn, how, as to immediacy and facility, and

even as to the commoner vivacity, positive beauty might have to be

sweated for and paid for! Once achieved and installed it may

always be trusted to make the poor seeker feel he would have

blushed to the roots of his hair for failing of it; yet, how, as

its virtue can be essentially but the virtue of the whole, the

wayside traps set in the interest of muddlement and pleading but

the cause of the moment, of the particular bit in itself, have to

be kicked out of the path! All the sophistications in life, for

example, might have appeared to muster on behalf of the menace--

the menace to a bright variety--involved in Strether's having all

the subjective "say," as it were, to himself.

Had I, meanwhile, made him at once hero and historian, endowed him

with the romantic privilege of the "first person"--the darkest

abyss of romance this, inveterately, when enjoyed on the grand

scale--variety, and many other queer matters as well, might have

been smuggled in by a back door. Suffice it, to be brief, that the

first person, in the long piece, is a form foredoomed to looseness

and that looseness, never much my affair, had never been so little

so as on this particular occasion. All of which reflexions flocked

to the standard from the moment--a very early one--the question of

how to keep my form amusing while sticking so close to my central

figure and constantly taking its pattern from him had to be faced.

He arrives (arrives at Chester) as for the dreadful purpose of

giving his creator "no end" to tell about him--before which

rigorous mission the serenest of creators might well have quailed.

I was far from the serenest; I was more than agitated enough to

reflect that, grimly deprived of one alternative or one substitute

for "telling," I must address myself tooth and nail to another. I

couldn't, save by implication, make other persons tell EACH OTHER

about him--blest resource, blest necessity, of the drama, which

reaches its effects of unity, all remarkably, by paths absolutely

opposite to the paths of the novel: with other persons, save as

they were primarily HIS persons (not he primarily but one of

theirs), I had simply nothing to do. I had relations for him none

the less, by the mercy of Providence, quite as much as if my

exhibition was to be a muddle; if I could only by implication and

a show of consequence make other persons tell each other about

him, I could at least make him tell THEM whatever in the world he

must; and could so, by the same token--which was a further luxury

thrown in--see straight into the deep differences between what

that could do for me, or at all events for HIM, and the large ease

of "autobiography." It may be asked why, if one so keeps to one's

hero, one shouldn't make a single mouthful of "method," shouldn't

throw the reins on his neck and, letting them flap there as free

as in "Gil Blas" or in "David Copperfield," equip him with the

double privilege of subject and object--a course that has at

least the merit of brushing away questions at a sweep. The answer

to which is, I think, that one makes that surrender only if one is

prepared NOT to make certain precious discriminations.

The "first person" then, so employed, is addressed by the author

directly to ourselves, his possible readers, whom he has to reckon

with, at the best, by our English tradition, so loosely and

vaguely after all, so little respectfully, on so scant a

presumption of exposure to criticism. Strether, on the other hand,

encaged and provided for as "The Ambassadors" encages and

provides, has to keep in view proprieties much stiffer and more

salutary than any our straight and credulous gape are likely to

bring home to him, has exhibitional conditions to meet, in a word,

that forbid the terrible FLUIDITY of self-revelation. I may seem

not to better the case for my discrimination if I say that, for my

first care, I had thus inevitably to set him up a confidant or

two, to wave away with energy the custom of the seated mass of

explanation after the fact, the inserted block of merely

referential narrative, which flourishes so, to the shame of the

modern impatience, on the serried page of Balzac, but which seems

simply to appal our actual, our general weaker, digestion.

"Harking back to make up" took at any rate more doing, as the

phrase is, not only than the reader of to-day demands, but than he

will tolerate at any price any call upon him either to understand

or remotely to measure; and for the beauty of the thing when done

the current editorial mind in particular appears wholly without

sense. It is not, however, primarily for either of these reasons,

whatever their weight, that Strether's friend Waymarsh is so

keenly clutched at, on the threshold of the book, or that no less

a pounce is made on Maria Gostrey--without even the pretext,

either, of HER being, in essence, Strether's friend. She is the

reader's friend much rather--in consequence of dispositions that

make him so eminently require one; and she acts in that capacity,

and REALLY in that capacity alone, with exemplary devotion from

beginning to and of the book. She is an enrolled, a direct, aid to

lucidity; she is in fine, to tear off her mask, the most

unmitigated and abandoned of ficelles. Half the dramatist's art,

as we well know--since if we don't it's not the fault of the

proofs that lie scattered about us--is in the use of ficelles; by

which I mean in a deep dissimulation of his dependence on them.

Waymarsh only to a slighter degree belongs, in the whole business,

less to my subject than to my treatment of it; the interesting

proof, in these connexions, being that one has but to take one's

subject for the stuff of drama to interweave with enthusiasm as

many Gostreys as need be.

The material of "The Ambassadors," conforming in this respect

exactly to that of "The Wings of the Dove," published just before

it, is taken absolutely for the stuff of drama; so that, availing

myself of the opportunity given me by this edition for some

prefatory remarks on the latter work, I had mainly to make on its

behalf the point of its scenic consistency. It disguises that

virtue, in the oddest way in the world, by just LOOKING, as we

turn its pages, as little scenic as possible; but it sharply

divides itself, just as the composition before us does, into the

parts that prepare, that tend in fact to over-prepare, for scenes,

and the parts, or otherwise into the scenes, that justify and

crown the preparation. It may definitely be said, I think, that

everything in it that is not scene (not, I of course mean,

complete and functional scene, treating ALL the submitted matter,

as by logical start, logical turn, and logical finish) is

discriminated preparation, is the fusion and synthesis of picture.

These alternations propose themselves all recogniseably, I think,

from an early stage, as the very form and figure of "The

Ambassadors"; so that, to repeat, such an agent as Miss Gostrey

pre-engaged at a high salary, but waits in the draughty wing with

her shawl and her smelling-salts. Her function speaks at once for

itself, and by the time she has dined with Strether in London and

gone to a play with him her intervention as a ficelle is, I hold,

expertly justified. Thanks to it we have treated scenically, and

scenically alone, the whole lumpish question of Strether's "past,"

which has seen us more happily on the way than anything else could

have done; we have strained to a high lucidity and vivacity (or at

least we hope we have) certain indispensable facts; we have seen

our two or three immediate friends all conveniently and profitably

in "action"; to say nothing of our beginning to descry others, of

a remoter intensity, getting into motion, even if a bit vaguely as

yet, for our further enrichment. Let my first point be here that

the scene in question, that in which the whole situation at

Woollett and the complex forces that have propelled my hero to

where this lively extractor of his value and distiller of his

essence awaits him, is normal and entire, is really an excellent

STANDARD scene; copious, comprehensive, and accordingly never

short, but with its office as definite as that of the hammer on

the gong of the clock, the office of expressing ALL THAT IS IN the

hour.

The "ficelle" character of the subordinate party is as artfully

dissimulated, throughout, as may be, and to that extent that, with

the seams or joints of Maria Gostrey's ostensible connectedness

taken particular care of, duly smoothed over, that is, and

anxiously kept from showing as "pieced on;" this figure doubtless

achieves, after a fashion, something of the dignity of a prime

idea: which circumstance but shows us afresh how many quite

incalculable but none the less clear sources of enjoyment for the

infatuated artist, how many copious springs of our never-to-be-slighted

"fun" for the reader and critic susceptible of contagion, may

sound their incidental plash as soon as an artistic process begins

to enjoy free development. Exquisite--in illustration of this--

the mere interest and amusement of such at once "creative" and

critical questions as how and where and why to make Miss Gostrey's

false connexion carry itself, under a due high polish, as a real one.

Nowhere is it more of an artful expedient for mere consistency

of form, to mention a case, than in the last "scene" of the book,

where its function is to give or to add nothing whatever,

but only to express as vividly as possible certain things quite

other than itself and that are of the already fixed and appointed

measure. Since, however, all art is EXPRESSION, and is thereby

vividness, one was to find the door open here to any amount of

delightful dissimulation. These verily are the refinements and

ecstasies of method--amid which, or certainly under the influence

of any exhilarated demonstration of which, one must keep one's head

and not lose one's way. To cultivate an adequate intelligence

for them and to make that sense operative is positively to find

a charm in any produced ambiguity of appearance that is not

by the same stroke, and all helplessly, an ambiguity of sense.

To project imaginatively, for my hero, a relation that has

nothing to do with the matter (the matter of my subject) but has

everything to do with the manner (the manner of my presentation

of the same) and yet to treat it, at close quarters and for fully

economic expression's possible sake, as if it were important and

essential--to do that sort of thing and yet muddle nothing may

easily become, as one goes, a signally attaching proposition;

even though it all remains but part and parcel, I hasten to

recognise, of the merely general and related question of expressional

curiosity and expressional decency.

I am moved to add after so much insistence on the scenic side of

my labour that I have found the steps of re-perusal almost as much

waylaid here by quite another style of effort in the same signal

interest--or have in other words not failed to note how, even so

associated and so discriminated, the finest proprieties and charms

of the non-scenic may, under the right hand for them, still keep

their intelligibility and assert their office. Infinitely

suggestive such an observation as this last on the whole

delightful head, where representation is concerned, of possible

variety, of effective expressional change and contrast. One would

like, at such an hour as this, for critical licence, to go into

the matter of the noted inevitable deviation (from too fond an

original vision) that the exquisite treachery even of the

straightest execution may ever be trusted to inflict even on the

most mature plan--the case being that, though one's last

reconsidered production always seems to bristle with that

particular evidence, "The Ambassadors" would place a flood of such

light at my service. I must attach to my final remark here a

different import; noting in the other connexion I just glanced at

that such passages as that of my hero's first encounter with Chad

Newsome, absolute attestations of the non-scenic form though they

be, yet lay the firmest hand too--so far at least as intention

goes--on representational effect. To report at all closely and

completely of what "passes" on a given occasion is inevitably to

become more or less scenic; and yet in the instance I allude to,

WITH the conveyance, expressional curiosity and expressional

decency are sought and arrived at under quite another law. The

true inwardness of this may be at bottom but that one of the

suffered treacheries has consisted precisely, for Chad's whole

figure and presence, of a direct presentability diminished and

compromised--despoiled, that is, of its PROPORTIONAL advantage;

so that, in a word, the whole economy of his author's relation

to him has at important points to be redetermined. The book,

however, critically viewed, is touchingly full of these disguised

and repaired losses, these insidious recoveries, these intensely

redemptive consistencies. The pages in which Mamie Pocock gives

her appointed and, I can't but think, duly felt lift to the whole

action by the so inscrutably-applied side-stroke or short-cut of

our just watching and as quite at an angle of vision as yet

untried, her single hour of suspense in the hotel salon, in our

partaking of her concentrated study of the sense of matters

bearing on her own case, all the bright warm Paris afternoon, from

the balcony that overlooks the Tuileries garden--these are as

marked an example of the representational virtue that insists here

and there on being, for the charm of opposition and renewal, other

than the scenic. It wouldn't take much to make me further argue

that from an equal play of such oppositions the book gathers an

intensity that fairly adds to the dramatic--though the latter is

supposed to be the sum of all intensities; or that has at any rate

nothing to fear from juxtaposition with it. I consciously fail to

shrink in fact from that extravagance--I risk it rather, for the

sake of the moral involved; which is not that the particular

production before us exhausts the interesting questions it raises,

but that the Novel remains still, under the right persuasion, the

most independent, most elastic, most prodigious of literary forms.

HENRY JAMES.

Book First

I

Strether's first question, when he reached the hotel, was about his

friend; yet on his learning that Waymarsh was apparently not to

arrive till evening he was not wholly disconcerted. A telegram from

him bespeaking a room "only if not noisy," reply paid, was produced

for the enquirer at the office, so that the understanding they

should meet at Chester rather than at Liverpool remained to that

extent sound. The same secret principle, however, that had prompted

Strether not absolutely to desire Waymarsh's presence at the dock,

that had led him thus to postpone for a few hours his enjoyment of

it, now operated to make him feel he could still wait without

disappointment. They would dine together at the worst, and, with

all respect to dear old Waymarsh--if not even, for that matter, to

himself--there was little fear that in the sequel they shouldn't

see enough of each other. The principle I have just mentioned as

operating had been, with the most newly disembarked of the two men,

wholly instinctive--the fruit of a sharp sense that, delightful as

it would be to find himself looking, after so much separation, into

his comrade's face, his business would be a trifle bungled should

he simply arrange for this countenance to present itself to the

nearing steamer as the first "note," of Europe. Mixed with

everything was the apprehension, already, on Strether's part, that

it would, at best, throughout, prove the note of Europe in quite a

sufficient degree.

That note had been meanwhile--since the previous afternoon, thanks

to this happier device--such a consciousness of personal freedom as

he hadn't known for years; such a deep taste of change and of

having above all for the moment nobody and nothing to consider, as

promised already, if headlong hope were not too foolish, to colour

his adventure with cool success. There were people on the ship with

whom he had easily consorted--so far as ease could up to now be

imputed to him--and who for the most part plunged straight into the

current that set from the landing-stage to London; there were

others who had invited him to a tryst at the inn and had even

invoked his aid for a "look round" at the beauties of Liverpool;

but he had stolen away from every one alike, had kept no

appointment and renewed no acquaintance, had been indifferently

aware of the number of persons who esteemed themselves fortunate in

being, unlike himself, "met," and had even independently,

unsociably, alone, without encounter or relapse and by mere quiet

evasion, given his afternoon and evening to the immediate and the

sensible. They formed a qualified draught of Europe, an afternoon

and an evening on the banks of the Mersey, but such as it was he

took his potion at least undiluted. He winced a little, truly, at

the thought that Waymarsh might be already at Chester; he reflected

that, should he have to describe himself there as having "got in"

so early, it would be difficult to make the interval look

particularly eager; but he was like a man who, elatedly finding in

his pocket more money than usual, handles it a while and idly and

pleasantly chinks it before addressing himself to the business of

spending. That he was prepared to be vague to Waymarsh about the

hour of the ship's touching, and that he both wanted extremely to

see him and enjoyed extremely the duration of delay--these things,

it is to be conceived, were early signs in him that his relation to

his actual errand might prove none of the simplest. He was

burdened, poor Strether--it had better be confessed at the outset--

with the oddity of a double consciousness. There was detachment in

his zeal and curiosity in his indifference.

After the young woman in the glass cage had held up to him across

her counter the pale-pink leaflet bearing his friend's name, which

she neatly pronounced, he turned away to find himself, in the hall,

facing a lady who met his eyes as with an intention suddenly

determined, and whose features--not freshly young, not markedly

fine, but on happy terms with each other--came back to him as from

a recent vision. For a moment they stood confronted; then the

moment placed her: he had noticed her the day before, noticed her

at his previous inn, where--again in the hall--she had been briefly

engaged with some people of his own ship's company. Nothing had

actually passed between them, and he would as little have been able

to say what had been the sign of her face for him on the first

occasion as to name the ground of his present recognition.

Recognition at any rate appeared to prevail on her own side as

well--which would only have added to the mystery. All she now began

by saying to him nevertheless was that, having chanced to catch his

enquiry, she was moved to ask, by his leave, if it were possibly a

question of Mr. Waymarsh of Milrose Connecticut--Mr. Waymarsh the

American lawyer.

"Oh yes," he replied, "my very well-known friend. He's to meet me

here, coming up from Malvern, and I supposed he'd already have

arrived. But he doesn't come till later, and I'm relieved not to

have kept him. Do you know him?" Strether wound up.

It wasn't till after he had spoken that he became aware of how much

there had been in him of response; when the tone of her own

rejoinder, as well as the play of something more in her face--

something more, that is, than its apparently usual restless light--

seemed to notify him. "I've met him at Milrose--where I used

sometimes, a good while ago, to stay; I had friends there who were

friends of his, and I've been at his house. I won't answer for it

that he would know me," Strether's new acquaintance pursued; "but I

should be delighted to see him. Perhaps," she added, "I shall--for

I'm staying over." She paused while our friend took in these

things, and it was as if a good deal of talk had already passed.

They even vaguely smiled at it, and Strether presently observed

that Mr. Waymarsh would, no doubt, be easily to be seen. This,

however, appeared to affect the lady as if she might have advanced

too far. She appeared to have no reserves about anything. "Oh," she

said, "he won't care!"--and she immediately thereupon remarked that

she believed Strether knew the Munsters; the Munsters being the

people he had seen her with at Liverpool.

But he didn't, it happened, know the Munsters well enough to give

the case much of a lift; so that they were left together as if over

the mere laid table of conversation. Her qualification of the

mentioned connexion had rather removed than placed a dish, and

there seemed nothing else to serve. Their attitude remained, none

the less, that of not forsaking the board; and the effect of this

in turn was to give them the appearance of having accepted each

other with an absence of preliminaries practically complete. They

moved along the hall together, and Strether's companion threw off

that the hotel had the advantage of a garden. He was aware by this

time of his strange inconsequence: he had shirked the intimacies of

the steamer and had muffled the shock of Waymarsh only to find

himself forsaken, in this sudden case, both of avoidance and of

caution. He passed, under this unsought protection and before he

had so much as gone up to his room, into the garden of the hotel,

and at the end of ten minutes had agreed to meet there again, as

soon as he should have made himself tidy, the dispenser of such

good assurances. He wanted to look at the town, and they would

forthwith look together. It was almost as if she had been in

possession and received him as a guest. Her acquaintance with the

place presented her in a manner as a hostess, and Strether had a

rueful glance for the lady in the glass cage. It was as if this

personage had seen herself instantly superseded.

When in a quarter of an hour he came down, what his hostess saw,

what she might have taken in with a vision kindly adjusted, was the

lean, the slightly loose figure of a man of the middle height and

something more perhaps than the middle age--a man of five-and-fifty,

whose most immediate signs were a marked bloodless brownness of face,

a thick dark moustache, of characteristically American cut,

growing strong and falling low, a head of hair still abundant

but irregularly streaked with grey, and a nose of bold free

prominence, the even line, the high finish, as it might have been

called, of which, had a certain effect of mitigation. A perpetual

pair of glasses astride of this fine ridge, and a line, unusually

deep and drawn, the prolonged pen-stroke of time, accompanying the

curve of the moustache from nostril to chin, did something to

complete the facial furniture that an attentive observer would have

seen catalogued, on the spot, in the vision of the other party to

Strether's appointment. She waited for him in the garden, the other

party, drawing on a pair of singularly fresh soft and elastic light

gloves and presenting herself with a superficial readiness which,

as he approached her over the small smooth lawn and in the watery

English sunshine, he might, with his rougher preparation, have

marked as the model for such an occasion. She had, this lady, a

perfect plain propriety, an expensive subdued suitability, that her

companion was not free to analyse, but that struck him, so that his

consciousness of it was instantly acute, as a quality quite new to

him. Before reaching her he stopped on the grass and went through

the form of feeling for something, possibly forgotten, in the light

overcoat he carried on his arm; yet the essence of the act was no

more than the impulse to gain time. Nothing could have been odder

than Strether's sense of himself as at that moment launched in

something of which the sense would be quite disconnected from the

sense of his past and which was literally beginning there and then.

It had begun in fact already upstairs and before the dressing glass

that struck him as blocking further, so strangely, the dimness of

the window of his dull bedroom; begun with a sharper survey of the

elements of Appearance than he had for a long time been moved to

make. He had during those moments felt these elements to be not so

much to his hand as he should have liked, and then had fallen back

on the thought that they were precisely a matter as to which help

was supposed to come from what he was about to do. He was about to

go up to London, so that hat and necktie might wait. What had come

as straight to him as a ball in a well-played game--and caught

moreover not less neatly--was just the air, in the person of his

friend, of having seen and chosen, the air of achieved possession

of those vague qualities and quantities that collectively figured

to him as the advantage snatched from lucky chances. Without pomp

or circumstance, certainly, as her original address to him, equally

with his own response, had been, he would have sketched to himself

his impression of her as: "Well, she's more thoroughly civilized--!"

If "More thoroughly than WHOM?" would not have been for him a

sequel to this remark, that was just by reason of his deep

consciousness of the bearing of his comparison.

The amusement, at all events, of a civilisation intenser was what--

familiar compatriot as she was, with the full tone of the

compatriot and the rattling link not with mystery but only with

dear dyspeptic Waymarsh--she appeared distinctly to promise. His

pause while he felt in his overcoat was positively the pause of

confidence, and it enabled his eyes to make out as much of a case

for her, in proportion, as her own made out for himself. She

affected him as almost insolently young; but an easily carried

five-and-thirty could still do that. She was, however, like himself

marked and wan; only it naturally couldn't have been known to him

how much a spectator looking from one to the other might have

discerned that they had in common. It wouldn't for such a spectator

have been altogether insupposable that, each so finely brown and so

sharply spare, each confessing so to dents of surface and aids to

sight, to a disproportionate nose and a head delicately or grossly

grizzled, they might have been brother and sister. On this ground

indeed there would have been a residuum of difference; such a

sister having surely known in respect to such a brother the

extremity of separation, and such a brother now feeling in respect

to such a sister the extremity of surprise. Surprise, it was true,

was not on the other hand what the eyes of Strether's friend most

showed him while she gave him, stroking her gloves smoother, the

time he appreciated. They had taken hold of him straightway

measuring him up and down as if they knew how; as if he were human

material they had already in some sort handled. Their possessor was

in truth, it may be communicated, the mistress of a hundred cases

or categories, receptacles of the mind, subdivisions for

convenience, in which, from a full experience, she pigeon-holed her

fellow mortals with a hand as free as that of a compositor

scattering type. She was as equipped in this particular as Strether

was the reverse, and it made an opposition between them which he

might well have shrunk from submitting to if he had fully suspected

it. So far as he did suspect it he was on the contrary, after a

short shake of his consciousness, as pleasantly passive as might

be. He really had a sort of sense of what she knew. He had quite

the sense that she knew things he didn't, and though this was a

concession that in general he found not easy to make to women, he

made it now as good-humouredly as if it lifted a burden. His eyes

were so quiet behind his eternal nippers that they might almost

have been absent without changing his face, which took its

expression mainly, and not least its stamp of sensibility, from

other sources, surface and grain and form. He joined his guide in

an instant, and then felt she had profited still better than he by

his having been for the moments just mentioned, so at the disposal

of her intelligence. She knew even intimate things about him that

he hadn't yet told her and perhaps never would. He wasn't unaware

that he had told her rather remarkably many for the time, but these

were not the real ones. Some of the real ones, however, precisely,

were what she knew.

They were to pass again through the hall of the inn to get into the

street, and it was here she presently checked him with a question.

"Have you looked up my name?"

He could only stop with a laugh. "Have you looked up mine?"

"Oh dear, yes--as soon as you left me. I went to the office and

asked. Hadn't YOU better do the same?"

He wondered. "Find out who you are?--after the uplifted young woman

there has seen us thus scrape acquaintance!"

She laughed on her side now at the shade of alarm in his amusement.

"Isn't it a reason the more? If what you're afraid of is the injury

for me--my being seen to walk off with a gentleman who has to ask

who I am--l assure you I don't in the least mind. Here, however,"

she continued, "is my card, and as I find there's something else

again I have to say at the office, you can just study it during the

moment I leave you."

She left him after he had taken from her the small pasteboard she

had extracted from her pocket-book, and he had extracted another

from his own, to exchange with it, before she came back. He read

thus the simple designation "Maria Gostrey," to which was attached,

in a corner of the card, with a number, the name of a street,

presumably in Paris, without other appreciable identity than its

foreignness. He put the card into his waistcoat pocket, keeping his

own meanwhile in evidence; and as he leaned against the door-post

he met with the smile of a straying thought what the expanse before

the hotel offered to his view. It was positively droll to him that

he should already have Maria Gostrey, whoever she was--of which he

hadn't really the least idea--in a place of safe keeping. He had

somehow an assurance that he should carefully preserve the little

token he had just tucked in. He gazed with unseeing lingering eyes

as he followed some of the implications of his act, asking himself

if he really felt admonished to qualify it as disloyal. It was

prompt, it was possibly even premature, and there was little doubt

of the expression of face the sight of it would have produced in a

certain person. But if it was "wrong"--why then he had better not

have come out at all. At this, poor man, had he already--and even

before meeting Waymarsh--arrived. He had believed he had a limit,

but the limit had been transcended within thirty-six hours. By how

long a space on the plane of manners or even of morals, moreover,

he felt still more sharply after Maria Gostrey had come back to him

and with a gay decisive "So now--!" led him forth into the world.

This counted, it struck him as he walked beside her with his

overcoat on an arm, his umbrella under another and his personal

pasteboard a little stiffly retained between forefinger and thumb,

this struck him as really, in comparison his introduction to

things. It hadn't been "Europe" at Liverpool no--not even in the

dreadful delightful impressive streets the night before--to the

extent his present companion made it so. She hadn't yet done that

so much as when, after their walk had lasted a few minutes and he

had had time to wonder if a couple of sidelong glances from her

meant that he had best have put on gloves she almost pulled him up

with an amused challenge. "But why--fondly as it's so easy to

imagine your clinging to it--don't you put it away? Or if it's an

inconvenience to you to carry it, one's often glad to have one's

card back. The fortune one spends in them!"

Then he saw both that his way of marching with his own prepared

tribute had affected her as a deviation in one of those directions

he couldn't yet measure, and that she supposed this emblem to be

still the one he had received from her. He accordingly handed her

the card as if in restitution, but as soon as she had it she felt

the difference and, with her eyes on it, stopped short for apology.

"I like," she observed, "your name."

"Oh," he answered, "you won't have heard of it!" Yet he had his

reasons for not being sure but that she perhaps might.

Ah it was but too visible! She read it over again as one who had

never seen it. "'Mr. Lewis Lambert Strether'"--she sounded it

almost as freely as for any stranger. She repeated however that she

liked it--"particularly the Lewis Lambert. It's the name of a novel

of Balzac's."

"Oh I know that!" said Strether.

"But the novel's an awfully bad one."

"I know that too," Strether smiled. To which he added with an

irrelevance that was only superficial: "I come from Woollett

Massachusetts." It made her for some reason--the irrelevance or

whatever--laugh. Balzac had described many cities, but hadn't

described Woollett Massachusetts. "You say that," she returned,

"as if you wanted one immediately to know the worst."

"Oh I think it's a thing," he said, "that you must already have

made out. I feel it so that I certainly must look it, speak it,

and, as people say there, 'act' it. It sticks out of me, and you

knew surely for yourself as soon as you looked at me."

"The worst, you mean?"

"Well, the fact of where I come from. There at any rate it IS; so

that you won't be able, if anything happens, to say I've not been

straight with you."

"I see"--and Miss Gostrey looked really interested in the point he

had made. "But what do you think of as happening?"

Though he wasn't shy--which was rather anomalous--Strether gazed

about without meeting her eyes; a motion that was frequent with him

in talk, yet of which his words often seemed not at all the effect.

"Why that you should find me too hopeless." With which they walked

on again together while she answered, as they went, that the most

"hopeless" of her countryfolk were in general precisely those she

liked best. All sorts of other pleasant small things-small things

that were yet large for him--flowered in the air of the occasion,

but the bearing of the occasion itself on matters still remote

concerns us too closely to permit us to multiply our illustrations.

Two or three, however, in truth, we should perhaps regret to lose.

The tortuous wall--girdle, long since snapped, of the little

swollen city, half held in place by careful civic hands--wanders in

narrow file between parapets smoothed by peaceful generations,

pausing here and there for a dismantled gate or a bridged gap, with

rises and drops, steps up and steps down, queer twists, queer

contacts, peeps into homely streets and under the brows of gables,

views of cathedral tower and waterside fields, of huddled English

town and ordered English country. Too deep almost for words was the

delight of these things to Strether; yet as deeply mixed with it

were certain images of his inward picture. He had trod this walks

in the far-off time, at twenty-five; but that, instead of spoiling

it, only enriched it for present feeling and marked his renewal as

a thing substantial enough to share. It was with Waymarsh he should

have shared it. and he was now accordingly taking from him

something that was his due. He looked repeatedly at his watch, and

when he had done so for the fifth time Miss Gostrey took him up.

"You're doing something that you think not right."

It so touched the place that he quite changed colour and his laugh

grew almost awkward. "Am I enjoying it as much as THAT?"

"You're not enjoying it, I think, so much as you ought."

"I see"--he appeared thoughtfully to agree. "Great is my privilege."

"Oh it's not your privilege! It has nothing to do with me. It has

to do with yourself. Your failure's general."

"Ah there you are!" he laughed. "It's the failure of Woollett.

THAT'S general."

"The failure to enjoy," Miss Gostrey explained, "is what I mean."

"Precisely. Woollett isn't sure it ought to enjoy. If it were it

would. But it hasn't, poor thing," Strether continued, "any one to

show it how. It's not like me. I have somebody."

They had stopped, in the afternoon sunshine--constantly pausing, in

their stroll, for the sharper sense of what they saw--and Strether

rested on one of the high sides of the old stony groove of the

little rampart. He leaned back on this support with his face to the

tower of the cathedral, now admirably commanded by their station,

the high red-brown mass, square and subordinately spired and

crocketed, retouched and restored, but charming to his long-sealed

eyes and with the first swallows of the year weaving their flight

all round it. Miss Gostrey lingered near him, full of an air, to

which she more and more justified her right, of understanding the

effect of things. She quite concurred. "You've indeed somebody."

And she added: "I wish you WOULD let me show you how!"

"Oh I'm afraid of you!" he cheerfully pleaded.

She kept on him a moment, through her glasses and through his own,

a certain pleasant pointedness. "Ah no, you're not! You're not in

the least, thank goodness! If you had been we shouldn't so soon

have found ourselves here together. I think," she comfortably

concluded, "you trust me."

"I think I do!--but that's exactly what I'm afraid of. I shouldn't

mind if I didn't. It's falling thus in twenty minutes so utterly

into your hands. I dare say," Strether continued, "it's a sort of

thing you're thoroughly familiar with; but nothing more

extraordinary has ever happened to me."

She watched him with all her kindness. "That means simply that

you've recognised me--which IS rather beautiful and rare. You see

what I am." As on this, however, he protested, with a good-humoured

headshake, a resignation of any such claim, she had a moment of

explanation. "If you'll only come on further as you HAVE come

you'll at any rate make out. My own fate has been too many for me,

and I've succumbed to it. I'm a general guide--to 'Europe,' don't

you know? I wait for people--l put them through. I pick them up--

I set them down. I'm a sort of superior 'courier-maid.' I'm a

companion at large. I take people, as I've told you, about. I never

sought it--it has come to me. It has been my fate, and one's fate

one accepts. It's a dreadful thing to have to say, in so wicked a

world, but I verily believe that, such as you see me, there's

nothing I don't know. I know all the shops and the prices--but I

know worse things still. I bear on my back the huge load of our

national consciousness, or, in other words--for it comes to that--

of our nation itself. Of what is our nation composed but of the men

and women individually on my shoulders? I don't do it, you know,

for any particular advantage. I don't do it, for instance--some

people do, you know--for money."

Strether could only listen and wonder and weigh his chance. "And

yet, affected as you are then to so many of your clients, you can

scarcely be said to do it for love." He waited a moment. "How do we

reward you?"

She had her own hesitation, but "You don't!" she finally returned,

setting him again in motion. They went on, but in a few minutes,

though while still thinking over what she had said, he once more

took out his watch; mechanically, unconsciously and as if made

nervous by the mere exhilaration of what struck him as her strange

and cynical wit. He looked at the hour without seeing it, and then,

on something again said by his companion, had another pause.

"You're really in terror of him."

He smiled a smile that he almost felt to be sickly. "Now you can

see why I'm afraid of you."

"Because I've such illuminations? Why they're all for your help!

It's what I told you," she added, "just now. You feel as if this

were wrong."

He fell back once more, settling himself against the parapet as if

to hear more about it. "Then get me out!"

Her face fairly brightened for the joy of the appeal, but, as if it

were a question of immediate action, she visibly considered. "Out

of waiting for him?--of seeing him at all?"

"Oh no--not that," said poor Strether, looking grave. "I've got to

wait for him--and I want very much to see him. But out of the

terror. You did put your finger on it a few minutes ago. It's

general, but it avails itself of particular occasions. That's what

it's doing for me now. I'm always considering something else;

something else, I mean, than the thing of the moment. The obsession

of the other thing is the terror. I'm considering at present for

instance something else than YOU."

She listened with charming earnestness. "Oh you oughtn't to do

that!"

"It's what I admit. Make it then impossible."

She continued to think. "Is it really an 'order' from you?--that I

shall take the job? WILL you give yourself up?"

Poor Strether heaved his sigh. "If I only could! But that's the

deuce of it--that I never can. No--I can't."

She wasn't, however, discouraged. "But you want to at least?"

"Oh unspeakably!"

"Ah then, if you'll try!"--and she took over the job, as she had

called it, on the spot. "Trust me!" she exclaimed, and the action

of this, as they retraced their steps, was presently to make him

pass his hand into her arm in the manner of a benign dependent

paternal old person who wishes to be "nice" to a younger one. If he

drew it out again indeed as they approached the inn this may have

been because, after more talk had passed between them, the relation

of age, or at least of experience--which, for that matter, had

already played to and fro with some freedom--affected him as

incurring a readjustment. It was at all events perhaps lucky that

they arrived in sufficiently separate fashion within range of the

hotel-door. The young lady they had left in the glass cage watched

as if she had come to await them on the threshold. At her side

stood a person equally interested, by his attitude, in their

return, and the effect of the sight of whom was instantly to

determine for Strether another of those responsive arrests that we

have had so repeatedly to note. He left it to Miss Gostrey to name,

with the fine full bravado as it almost struck him, of her

"Mr. Waymarsh!" what was to have been, what--he more than ever felt

as his short stare of suspended welcome took things in--would have

been, but for herself, his doom. It was already upon him even at

that distance--Mr. Waymarsh was for HIS part joyless.

II

He had none the less to confess to this friend that evening that he

knew almost nothing about her, and it was a deficiency that

Waymarsh, even with his memory refreshed by contact, by her own

prompt and lucid allusions and enquiries, by their having publicly

partaken of dinner in her company, and by another stroll, to which

she was not a stranger, out into the town to look at the cathedral

by moonlight--it was a blank that the resident of Milrose, though

admitting acquaintance with the Munsters, professed himself unable

to fill. He had no recollection of Miss Gostrey, and two or three

questions that she put to him about those members of his circle

had, to Strether's observation, the same effect he himself had

already more directly felt--the effect of appearing to place all

knowledge, for the time, on this original woman's side. It

interested him indeed to mark the limits of any such relation for

her with his friend as there could possibly be a question of, and

it particularly struck him that they were to be marked altogether

in Waymarsh's quarter. This added to his own sense of having gone

far with her-gave him an early illustration of a much shorter

course. There was a certitude he immediately grasped--a conviction

that Waymarsh would quite fail, as it were, and on whatever degree

of acquaintances to profit by her.

There had been after the first interchange among the three a talk

of some five minutes in the hall, and then the two men had

adjourned to the garden, Miss Gostrey for the time disappearing.

Strether in due course accompanied his friend to the room he had

bespoken and had, before going out, scrupulously visited; where at

the end of another half-hour he had no less discreetly left him.

On leaving him he repaired straight to his own room, but with the

prompt effect of feeling the compass of that chamber resented by

his condition. There he enjoyed at once the first consequence of

their reunion. A place was too small for him after it that had

seemed large enough before. He had awaited it with something he

would have been sorry, have been almost ashamed not to recognise as

emotion, yet with a tacit assumption at the same time that emotion

would in the event find itself relieved. The actual oddity was that

he was only more excited; and his excitement-to which indeed he

would have found it difficult instantly to give a name--brought him

once more downstairs and caused him for some minutes vaguely to

wander. He went once more to the garden; he looked into the public

room, found Miss Gostrey writing letters and backed out; he roamed,

fidgeted and wasted time; but he was to have his more intimate

session with his friend before the evening closed.

It was late--not till Strether had spent an hour upstairs with him--

that this subject consented to betake himself to doubtful rest.

Dinner and the subsequent stroll by moonlight--a dream, on

Strether's part, of romantic effects rather prosaically merged in a

mere missing of thicker coats--had measurably intervened, and this

midnight conference was the result of Waymarsh's having (when they

were free, as he put it, of their fashionable friend) found the

smoking-room not quite what he wanted, and yet bed what he wanted

less. His most frequent form of words was that he knew himself, and

they were applied on this occasion to his certainty of not

sleeping. He knew himself well enough to know that he should have a

night of prowling unless he should succeed, as a preliminary, in

getting prodigiously tired. If the effort directed to this end

involved till a late hour the presence of Strether--consisted,

that is, in the detention of the latter for full discourse--there

was yet an impression of minor discipline involved for our friend

in the picture Waymarsh made as he sat in trousers and shirt on the

edge of his couch. With his long legs extended and his large back

much bent, he nursed alternately, for an almost incredible time,

his elbows and his beard. He struck his visitor as extremely, as

almost wilfully uncomfortable; yet what had this been for Strether,

from that first glimpse of him disconcerted in the porch of the

hotel, but the predominant notes. The discomfort was in a manner

contagious, as well as also in a manner inconsequent and unfounded;

the visitor felt that unless he should get used to it--or unless

Waymarsh himself should--it would constitute a menace for his own

prepared, his own already confirmed, consciousness of the

agreeable. On their first going up together to the room Strether

had selected for him Waymarsh had looked it over in silence and

with a sigh that represented for his companion, if not the habit of

disapprobation, at least the despair of felicity; and this look had

recurred to Strether as the key of much he had since observed.

"Europe," he had begun to gather from these things, had up to now

rather failed of its message to him; he hadn't got into tune with

it and had at the end of three months almost renounced any such

expectation.

He really appeared at present to insist on that by just perching

there with the gas in his eyes. This of itself somehow conveyed the

futility of single rectifications in a multiform failure. He had a

large handsome head and a large sallow seamed face--a striking

significant physiognomic total, the upper range of which, the great

political brow, the thick loose hair, the dark fuliginous eyes,

recalled even to a generation whose standard had dreadfully

deviated the impressive image, familiar by engravings and busts, of

some great national worthy of the earlier part of the mid-century.

He was of the personal type--and it was an element in the power and

promise that in their early time Strether had found in him--of the

American statesman, the statesman trained in "Congressional halls,"

of an elder day. The legend had been in later years that as the

lower part of his face, which was weak, and slightly crooked,

spoiled the likeness, this was the real reason for the growth of

his beard, which might have seemed to spoil it for those not in the

secret. He shook his mane; he fixed, with his admirable eyes, his

auditor or his observer; he wore no glasses and had a way, partly

formidable, yet also partly encouraging, as from a representative

to a constituent, of looking very hard at those who approached him.

He met you as if you had knocked and he had bidden you enter.

Strether, who hadn't seen him for so long an interval, apprehended

him now with a freshness of taste, and had perhaps never done him

such ideal justice. The head was bigger, the eyes finer, than they

need have been for the career; but that only meant, after all, that

the career was itself expressive. What it expressed at midnight in

the gas-glaring bedroom at Chester was that the subject of it had,

at the end of years, barely escaped, by flight in time, a general

nervous collapse. But this very proof of the full life, as the full

life was understood at Milrose, would have made to Strether's

imagination an element in which Waymarsh could have floated easily

had he only consented to float. Alas nothing so little resembled

floating as the rigour with which, on the edge of his bed, he

hugged his posture of prolonged impermanence. It suggested to his

comrade something that always, when kept up, worried him--a person

established in a railway-coach with a forward inclination. It

represented the angle at which poor Waymarsh was to sit through the

ordeal of Europe.

Thanks to the stress of occupation, the strain of professions, the

absorption and embarrassment of each, they had not, at home, during

years before this sudden brief and almost bewildering reign of

comparative ease, found so much as a day for a meeting; a fact that

was in some degree an explanation of the sharpness with which most

of his friend's features stood out to Strether. Those he had lost

sight of since the early time came back to him; others that it was

never possible to forget struck him now as sitting, clustered and

expectant, like a somewhat defiant family-group, on the doorstep of

their residence. The room was narrow for its length, and the

occupant of the bed thrust so far a pair of slippered feet that the

visitor had almost to step over them in his recurrent rebounds from

his chair to fidget back and forth. There were marks the friends

made on things to talk about, and on things not to, and one of the

latter in particular fell like the tap of chalk on the blackboard.

Married at thirty, Waymarsh had not lived with his wife for fifteen

years, and it came up vividly between them in the glare of the gas

that Strether wasn't to ask about her. He knew they were still

separate and that she lived at hotels, travelled in Europe, painted

her face and wrote her husband abusive letters, of not one of

which, to a certainty, that sufferer spared himself the perusal;

but he respected without difficulty the cold twilight that had

settled on this side of his companion's life. It was a province in

which mystery reigned and as to which Waymarsh had never spoken the

informing word. Strether, who wanted to do him the highest justice

wherever he COULD do it, singularly admired him for the dignity of

this reserve, and even counted it as one of the grounds--grounds

all handled and numbered--for ranking him, in the range of their

acquaintance, as a success. He WAS a success, Waymarsh, in spite of

overwork, or prostration, of sensible shrinkage, of his wife's

letters and of his not liking Europe. Strether would have reckoned

his own career less futile had he been able to put into it anything

so handsome as so much fine silence. One might one's self easily

have left Mrs. Waymarsh; and one would assuredly have paid one's

tribute to the ideal in covering with that attitude the derision of

having been left by her. Her husband had held his tongue and had

made a large income; and these were in especial the achievements as

to which Strether envied him. Our friend had had indeed on his side

too a subject for silence, which he fully appreciated; but it was a

matter of a different sort, and the figure of the income he had

arrived at had never been high enough to look any one in the face.

"I don't know as I quite see what you require it for. You don't

appear sick to speak of." It was of Europe Waymarsh thus finally

spoke.

"Well," said Strether, who fell as much as possible into step, "I

guess I don't FEEL sick now that I've started. But I had pretty

well run down before I did start."

Waymarsh raised his melancholy look. "Ain't you about up to your

usual average?"

It was not quite pointedly sceptical, but it seemed somehow a plea

for the purest veracity, and it thereby affected our friend as the

very voice of Milrose. He had long since made a mental distinction--

though never in truth daring to betray it--between the voice of

Milrose and the voice even of Woollett. It was the former he felt,

that was most in the real tradition. There had been occasions in

his past when the sound of it had reduced him to temporary

confusion, and the present, for some reason, suddenly became such

another. It was nevertheless no light matter that the very effect

of his confusion should be to make him again prevaricate. "That

description hardly does justice to a man to whom it has done such a

lot of good to see YOU."

Waymarsh fixed on his washing-stand the silent detached stare with

which Milrose in person, as it were, might have marked the

unexpectedness of a compliment from Woollett, and Strether for his

part, felt once more like Woollett in person. "I mean," his friend

presently continued, "that your appearance isn't as bad as I've

seen it: it compares favourably with what it was when I last

noticed it." On this appearance Waymarsh's eyes yet failed to rest;

it was almost as if they obeyed an instinct of propriety, and the

effect was still stronger when, always considering the basin and

jug, he added: "You've filled out some since then."

"I'm afraid I have," Strether laughed: "one does fill out some with

all one takes in, and I've taken in, I dare say, more than I've

natural room for. I was dog-tired when I sailed." It had the oddest

sound of cheerfulness.

"I was dog-tired," his companion returned, "when I arrived, and it's

this wild hunt for rest that takes all the life out of me. The fact

is, Strether--and it's a comfort to have you here at last to say it to;

though I don't know, after all, that I've really waited; I've told

it to people I've met in the cars--the fact is, such a country as this

ain't my KIND of country anyway. There ain't a country I've seen over

here that DOES seem my kind. Oh I don't say but what there are plenty

of pretty places and remarkable old things; but the trouble is that I

don't seem to feel anywhere in tune. That's one of the reasons why I

suppose I've gained so little. I haven't had the first sign of that

lift I was led to expect." With this he broke out more earnestly.

"Look here--I want to go back."

His eyes were all attached to Strether's now, for he was one of the

men who fully face you when they talk of themselves. This enabled

his friend to look at him hard and immediately to appear to the

highest advantage in his eyes by doing so. "That's a genial thing

to say to a fellow who has come out on purpose to meet you!"

Nothing could have been finer, on this, than Waymarsh's sombre

glow. "HAVE you come out on purpose?"

"Well--very largely."

"I thought from the way you wrote there was something back of it."

Strether hesitated. "Back of my desire to be with you?"

"Back of your prostration."

Strether, with a smile made more dim by a certain consciousness,

shook his head. "There are all the causes of it!"

"And no particular cause that seemed most to drive you?"

Our friend could at last conscientiously answer. "Yes. One. There

IS a matter that has had much to do with my coming out."

Waymarsh waited a little. "Too private to mention?"

"No, not too private--for YOU. Only rather complicated."

"Well," said Waymarsh, who had waited again, "I MAY lose my mind

over here, but I don't know as I've done so yet."

"Oh you shall have the whole thing. But not tonight."

Waymarsh seemed to sit stiffer and to hold his elbows tighter. "Why

not--if I can't sleep?"

"Because, my dear man, I CAN!"

"Then where's your prostration?"

"Just in that--that I can put in eight hours." And Strether brought

it out that if Waymarsh didn't "gain" it was because he didn't go

to bed: the result of which was, in its order, that, to do the

latter justice, he permitted his friend to insist on his really

getting settled. Strether, with a kind coercive hand for it,

assisted him to this consummation, and again found his own part in

their relation auspiciously enlarged by the smaller touches of

lowering the lamp and seeing to a sufficiency of blanket. It

somehow ministered for him to indulgence to feel Waymarsh, who

looked unnaturally big and black in bed, as much tucked in as a

patient in a hospital and, with his covering up to his chin, as

much simplified by it He hovered in vague pity, to be brief, while

his companion challenged him out of the bedclothes. "Is she really

after you? Is that what's behind?"

Strether felt an uneasiness at the direction taken by his

companion's insight, but he played a little at uncertainty. "Behind

my coming out?"

"Behind your prostration or whatever. It's generally felt, you

know, that she follows you up pretty close."

Strether's candour was never very far off. "Oh it has occurred to

you that I'm literally running away from Mrs. Newsome?"

"Well, I haven't KNOWN but what you are. You're a very attractive

man, Strether. You've seen for yourself," said Waymarsh "what that

lady downstairs makes of it. Unless indeed," he rambled on with an

effect between the ironic and the anxious, "it's you who are after

HER. IS Mrs. Newsome OVER here?" He spoke as with a droll dread of

her.

It made his friend--though rather dimly--smile. "Dear no she's

safe, thank goodness--as I think I more and more feel--at home. She

thought of coming, but she gave it up. I've come in a manner

instead of her; and come to that extent--for you're right in your

inference--on her business. So you see there IS plenty of

connexion."

Waymarsh continued to see at least all there was. "Involving

accordingly the particular one I've referred to?"

Strether took another turn about the room, giving a twitch to his

companion's blanket and finally gaining the door. His feeling was

that of a nurse who had earned personal rest by having made

everything straight. "Involving more things than I can think of

breaking ground on now. But don't be afraid--you shall have them

from me: you'll probably find yourself having quite as much of them

as you can do with. I shall--if we keep together--very much depend

on your impression of some of them."

Waymarsh's acknowledgement of this tribute was characteristically

indirect. "You mean to say you don't believe we WILL keep

together?"

"I only glance at the danger," Strether paternally said, "because

when I hear you wail to go back I seem to see you open up such

possibilities of folly."

Waymarsh took it--silent a little--like a large snubbed child "What

are you going to do with me?"

It was the very question Strether himself had put to Miss Gostrey,

and he wondered if he had sounded like that. But HE at least could

be more definite. "I'm going to take you right down to London."

"Oh I've been down to London!" Waymarsh more softly moaned. "I've

no use, Strether, for anything down there."

"Well," said Strether, good-humouredly, "I guess you've some use

for me."

"So I've got to go?"

"Oh you've got to go further yet."

"Well," Waymarsh sighed, "do your damnedest! Only you WILL tell me

before you lead me on all the way--?"

Our friend had again so lost himself, both for amusement and for

contrition, in the wonder of whether he had made, in his own

challenge that afternoon, such another figure, that he for an

instant missed the thread. "Tell you--?"

"Why what you've got on hand."

Strether hesitated. "Why it's such a matter as that even if I

positively wanted I shouldn't be able to keep it from you."

Waymarsh gloomily gazed. "What does that mean then but that your

trip is just FOR her?"

"For Mrs. Newsome? Oh it certainly is, as I say. Very much."

"Then why do you also say it's for me?"

Strether, in impatience, violently played with his latch. "It's

simple enough. It's for both of you."

Waymarsh at last turned over with a groan. "Well, I won't marry

you!"

"Neither, when it comes to that--!" But the visitor had already

laughed and escaped.

III

He had told Miss Gostrey he should probably take, for departure

with Waymarsh, some afternoon train, and it thereupon in the

morning appeared that this lady had made her own plan for an

earlier one. She had breakfasted when Strether came into the

coffee-room; but, Waymarsh not having yet emerged, he was in time

to recall her to the terms of their understanding and to pronounce

her discretion overdone. She was surely not to break away at the

very moment she had created a want. He had met her as she rose

from her little table in a window, where, with the morning papers

beside her, she reminded him, as he let her know, of Major

Pendennis breakfasting at his club--a compliment of which she

professed a deep appreciation; and he detained her as pleadingly

as if he had already--and notably under pressure of the visions of

the night--learned to be unable to do without her. She must teach

him at all events, before she went, to order breakfast as

breakfast was ordered in Europe, and she must especially sustain

him in the problem of ordering for Waymarsh. The latter had laid

upon his friend, by desperate sounds through the door of his room,

dreadful divined responsibilities in respect to beefsteak and

oranges--responsibilities which Miss Gostrey took over with an

alertness of action that matched her quick intelligence. She had

before this weaned the expatriated from traditions compared with

which the matutinal beefsteak was but the creature of an hour, and

it was not for her, with some of her memories, to falter in the

path though she freely enough declared, on reflexion, that there

was always in such cases a choice of opposed policies. "There are

times when to give them their head, you know--!"

They had gone to wait together in the garden for the dressing of

the meal, and Strether found her more suggestive than ever "Well,

what?"

"Is to bring about for them such a complexity of relations-unless

indeed we call it a simplicity!--that the situation HAS to wind

itself up. They want to go back."

"And you want them to go!" Strether gaily concluded.

"I always want them to go, and I send them as fast as I can.'

"Oh I know--you take them to Liverpool."

"Any port will serve in a storm. I'm--with all my other functions--

an agent for repatriation. I want to re-people our stricken

country. What will become of it else? I want to discourage others."

The ordered English garden, in the freshness of the day, was

delightful to Strether, who liked the sound, under his feet, of

the tight fine gravel, packed with the chronic damp, and who had

the idlest eye for the deep smoothness of turf and the clean

curves of paths. "Other people?"

"Other countries. Other people--yes. I want to encourage our own."

Strether wondered. "Not to come? Why then do you 'meet' them--

since it doesn't appear to be to stop them?"

"Oh that they shouldn't come is as yet too much to ask. What I

attend to is that they come quickly and return still more so. I

meet them to help it to be over as soon as possible, and though I

don't stop them I've my way of putting them through. That's my

little system; and, if you want to know," said Maria Gostrey,

"it's my real secret, my innermost mission and use. I only seem,

you see, to beguile and approve; but I've thought it all out and

I'm working all the while underground. I can't perhaps quite give

you my formula, but I think that practically I succeed. I send you

back spent. So you stay back. Passed through my hands--"

"We don't turn up again?" The further she went the further he

always saw himself able to follow. "I don't want your formula--I

feel quite enough, as I hinted yesterday, your abysses. Spent!" he

echoed. "If that's how you're arranging so subtly to send me I

thank you for the warning."

For a minute, amid the pleasantness--poetry in tariffed items, but

all the more, for guests already convicted, a challenge to

consumption--they smiled at each other in confirmed fellowship. "Do

you call it subtly? It's a plain poor tale. Besides, you're a

special case."

"Oh special cases--that's weak!" She was weak enough, further

still, to defer her journey and agree to accompany the gentlemen on

their own, might a separate carriage mark her independence; though

it was in spite of this to befall after luncheon that she went off

alone and that, with a tryst taken for a day of her company in

London, they lingered another night. She had, during the morning--

spent in a way that he was to remember later on as the very climax

of his foretaste, as warm with presentiments, with what he would

have called collapses--had all sorts of things out with Strether;

and among them the fact that though there was never a moment of her

life when she wasn't "due" somewhere, there was yet scarce a

perfidy to others of which she wasn't capable for his sake. She

explained moreover that wherever she happened to be she found a

dropped thread to pick up, a ragged edge to repair, some familiar

appetite in ambush, jumping out as she approached, yet appeasable

with a temporary biscuit. It became, on her taking the risk of the

deviation imposed on him by her insidious arrangement of his

morning meal, a point of honour for her not to fail with Waymarsh

of the larger success too; and her subsequent boast to Strether was

that she had made their friend fare--and quite without his knowing

what was the matter--as Major Pendennis would have fared at the

Megatherium. She had made him breakfast like a gentleman, and it

was nothing, she forcibly asserted, to what she would yet make him

do. She made him participate in the slow reiterated ramble with

which, for Strether, the new day amply filled itself; and it was by

her art that he somehow had the air, on the ramparts and in the

Rows, of carrying a point of his own.

The three strolled and stared and gossiped, or at least the

two did; the case really yielding for their comrade, if analysed,

but the element of stricken silence. This element indeed affected

Strether as charged with audible rumblings, but he was conscious of

the care of taking it explicitly as a sign of pleasant peace. He

wouldn't appeal too much, for that provoked stiffness; yet he

wouldn't be too freely tacit, for that suggested giving up.

Waymarsh himself adhered to an ambiguous dumbness that might have

represented either the growth of a perception or the despair of

one; and at times and in places--where the low-browed galleries

were darkest, the opposite gables queerest, the solicitations of

every kind densest--the others caught him fixing hard some object

of minor interest, fixing even at moments nothing discernible, as

if he were indulging it with a truce. When he met Strether's eye on

such occasions he looked guilty and furtive, fell the next minute

into some attitude of retractation. Our friend couldn't show him

the right things for fear of provoking some total renouncement, and

was tempted even to show him the wrong in order to make him differ

with triumph. There were moments when he himself felt shy of

professing the full sweetness of the taste of leisure, and there

were others when he found himself feeling as if his passages of

interchange with the lady at his side might fall upon the third

member of their party very much as Mr. Burchell, at Dr. Primrose's

fireside, was influenced by the high flights of the visitors from

London. The smallest things so arrested and amused him that he

repeatedly almost apologised--brought up afresh in explanation his

plea of a previous grind. He was aware at the same time that his

grind had been as nothing to Waymarsh's, and he repeatedly

confessed that, to cover his frivolity, he was doing his best for

his previous virtue. Do what he might, in any case, his previous

virtue was still there, and it seemed fairly to stare at him out of

the windows of shops that were not as the shops of Woollett, fairly

to make him want things that he shouldn't know what to do with. It

was by the oddest, the least admissible of laws demoralising him

now; and the way it boldly took was to make him want more wants.

These first walks in Europe were in fact a kind of finely lurid

intimation of what one might find at the end of that process. Had

he come back after long years, in something already so like the

evening of life, only to be exposed to it? It was at all events

over the shop-windows that he made, with Waymarsh, most free;

though it would have been easier had not the latter most sensibly

yielded to the appeal of the merely useful trades. He pierced with

his sombre detachment the plate-glass of ironmongers and saddlers,

while Strether flaunted an affinity with the dealers in stamped

letter-paper and in smart neckties. Strether was in fact

recurrently shameless in the presence of the tailors, though it was

just over the heads of the tailors that his countryman most loftily

looked. This gave Miss Gostrey a grasped opportunity to back up

Waymarsh at his expense. The weary lawyer--it was unmistakeable--

had a conception of dress; but that, in view of some of the

features of the effect produced, was just what made the danger of

insistence on it. Strether wondered if he by this time thought Miss

Gostrey less fashionable or Lambert Strether more so; and it

appeared probable that most of the remarks exchanged between this

latter pair about passers, figures, faces, personal types,

exemplified in their degree the disposition to talk as "society"

talked.

Was what was happening to himself then, was what already HAD

happened, really that a woman of fashion was floating him into

society and that an old friend deserted on the brink was watching

the force of the current? When the woman of fashion permitted

Strether--as she permitted him at the most--the purchase of a pair

of gloves, the terms she made about it, the prohibition of neckties

and other items till she should be able to guide him through the

Burlington Arcade, were such as to fall upon a sensitive ear as a

challenge to just imputations. Miss Gostrey was such a woman of

fashion as could make without a symptom of vulgar blinking an

appointment for the Burlington Arcade. Mere discriminations about a

pair of gloves could thus at any rate represent--always for such

sensitive ears as were in question--possibilities of something that

Strether could make a mark against only as the peril of apparent

wantonness. He had quite the consciousness of his new friend, for

their companion, that he might have had of a Jesuit in petticoats,

a representative of the recruiting interests of the Catholic

Church. The Catholic Church, for Waymarsh-that was to say the

enemy, the monster of bulging eyes and far-reaching quivering

groping tentacles--was exactly society, exactly the multiplication

of shibboleths, exactly the discrimination of types and tones,

exactly the wicked old Rows of Chester, rank with feudalism;

exactly in short Europe.

There was light for observation, however, in an incident that

occurred just before they turned back to luncheon. Waymarsh had

been for a quarter of an hour exceptionally mute and distant, and

something, or other--Strether was never to make out exactly what--

proved, as it were, too much for him after his comrades had stood

for three minutes taking in, while they leaned on an old balustrade

that guarded the edge of the Row, a particularly crooked and

huddled street-view. "He thinks us sophisticated, he thinks us

worldly, he thinks us wicked, he thinks us all sorts of queer

things," Strether reflected; for wondrous were the vague quantities

our friend had within a couple of short days acquired the habit of

conveniently and conclusively lumping together. There seemed

moreover a direct connexion between some such inference and a

sudden grim dash taken by Waymarsh to the opposite side. This

movement was startlingly sudden, and his companions at first

supposed him to have espied, to be pursuing, the glimpse of an

acquaintance. They next made out, however, that an open door had

instantly received him, and they then recognised him as engulfed in

the establishment of a jeweller, behind whose glittering front he

was lost to view. The fact had somehow the note of a demonstration,

and it left each of the others to show a face almost of fear. But

Miss Gostrey broke into a laugh. "What's the matter with him?"

"Well," said Strether, "he can't stand it."

"But can't stand what?"

"Anything. Europe."

"Then how will that jeweller help him?"

Strether seemed to make it out, from their position, between the

interstices of arrayed watches, of close-hung dangling gewgaws.

"You'll see."

"Ah that's just what--if he buys anything--I'm afraid of: that I

shall see something rather dreadful."

Strether studied the finer appearances. "He may buy everything."

"Then don't you think we ought to follow him?"

"Not for worlds. Besides we can't. We're paralysed. We exchange a

long scared look, we publicly tremble. The thing is, you see, we

'realise.' He has struck for freedom."

She wondered but she laughed. "Ah what a price to pay! And I was

preparing some for him so cheap."

"No, no," Strether went on, frankly amused now; "don't call it

that: the kind of freedom you deal in is dear." Then as to justify

himself: "Am I not in MY way trying it? It's this."

"Being here, you mean, with me?''

"Yes, and talking to you as I do. I've known you a few hours, and

I've known HIM all my life; so that if the ease I thus take with

you about him isn't magnificent"--and the thought of it held him a

moment--"why it's rather base."

"It's magnificent!" said Miss Gostrey to make an end of it. "And

you should hear," she added, "the ease I take--and I above all

intend to take--with Mr. Waymarsh."

Strether thought. "About ME? Ah that's no equivalent.

The equivalent would be Waymarsh's himself serving me up--

his remorseless analysis of me. And he'll never do that"--

he was sadly clear. "He'll never remorselessly analyse me."

He quite held her with the authority of this. "He'll never

say a word to you about me."

She took it in; she did it justice; yet after an instant her

reason, her restless irony, disposed of it. "Of course he won't.

For what do you take people, that they're able to say words about

anything, able remorselessly to analyse? There are not many like

you and me. It will be only because he's too stupid."

It stirred in her friend a sceptical echo which was at the same

time the protest of the faith of years. "Waymarsh stupid?"

"Compared with you."

Strether had still his eyes on the jeweller's front, and he waited

a moment to answer. "He's a success of a kind that I haven't

approached."

"Do you mean he has made money?"

"He makes it--to my belief. And I," said Strether, "though with a

back quite as bent, have never made anything. I'm a perfectly

equipped failure."

He feared an instant she'd ask him if he meant he was poor; and he

was glad she didn't, for he really didn't know to what the truth on

this unpleasant point mightn't have prompted her. She only,

however, confirmed his assertion. "Thank goodness you're a failure--

it's why I so distinguish you! Anything else to-day is too

hideous. Look about you--look at the successes. Would you BE one,

on your honour? Look, moreover," she continued, "at me."

For a little accordingly their eyes met. "I see," Strether

returned. "You too are out of it."

"The superiority you discern in me," she concurred, "announces my

futility. If you knew," she sighed, "the dreams of my youth! But

our realities are what has brought us together. We're beaten

brothers in arms."

He smiled at her kindly enough, but he shook his head. "It doesn't

alter the fact that you're expensive. You've cost me already--!"

But he had hung fire. "Cost you what?"

"Well, my past--in one great lump. But no matter," he laughed:

"I'll pay with my last penny."

Her attention had unfortunately now been engaged by their comrade's

return, for Waymarsh met their view as he came out of his shop. "I

hope he hasn't paid," she said, "with HIS last; though I'm

convinced he has been splendid, and has been so for you."

"Ah no--not that!"

"Then for me?"

"Quite as little." Waymarsh was by this time near enough to show

signs his friend could read, though he seemed to look almost

carefully at nothing in particular.

"Then for himself?"

"For nobody. For nothing. For freedom."

"But what has freedom to do with it?"

Strether's answer was indirect. "To be as good as you and me. But

different."

She had had time to take in their companion's face; and with it, as

such things were easy for her, she took in all. "Different--yes.

But better!"

If Waymarsh was sombre he was also indeed almost sublime. He told

them nothing, left his absence unexplained, and though they were

convinced he had made some extraordinary purchase they were never

to learn its nature. He only glowered grandly at the tops of the

old gables. "It's the sacred rage," Strether had had further time

to say; and this sacred rage was to become between them, for

convenient comprehension, the description of one of his periodical

necessities. It was Strether who eventually contended that it did

make him better than they. But by that time Miss Gostrey was

convinced that she didn't want to be better than Strether.

Book Second

I

Those occasions on which Strether was, in association with the

exile from Milrose, to see the sacred rage glimmer through would

doubtless have their due periodicity; but our friend had meanwhile

to find names for many other matters. On no evening of his life

perhaps, as he reflected, had he had to supply so many as on the

third of his short stay in London; an evening spent by Miss

Gostrey's side at one of the theatres, to which he had found

himself transported, without his own hand raised, on the mere

expression of a conscientious wonder. She knew her theatre, she

knew her play, as she had triumphantly known, three days running,

everything else, and the moment filled to the brim, for her

companion, that apprehension of the interesting which, whether or

no the interesting happened to filter through his guide, strained

now to its limits his brief opportunity. Waymarsh hadn't come with

them; he had seen plays enough, he signified, before Strether had

joined him--an affirmation that had its full force when his friend

ascertained by questions that he had seen two and a circus.

Questions as to what he had seen had on him indeed an effect only

less favourable than questions as to what he hadn't. He liked the

former to be discriminated; but how could it be done, Strether

asked of their constant counsellor, without discriminating the

latter?

Miss Gostrey had dined with him at his hotel, face to face over a

small table on which the lighted candles had rose-coloured shades;

and the rose-coloured shades and the small table and the soft

fragrance of the lady--had anything to his mere sense ever been so

soft?--were so many touches in he scarce knew what positive high

picture. He had been to the theatre, even to the opera, in Boston,

with Mrs. Newsome, more than once acting as her only escort; but

there had been no little confronted dinner, no pink lights, no

whiff of vague sweetness, as a preliminary: one of the results of

which was that at present, mildly rueful, though with a sharpish

accent, he actually asked himself WHY there hadn't. There was much

the same difference in his impression of the noticed state of his

companion, whose dress was "cut down," as he believed the term to

be, in respect to shoulders and bosom, in a manner quite other than

Mrs. Newsome's, and who wore round her throat a broad red velvet

band with an antique jewel--he was rather complacently sure it was

antique--attached to it in front. Mrs. Newsome's dress was never in

any degree "cut down," and she never wore round her throat a broad

red velvet band: if she had, moreover, would it ever have served so

to carry on and complicate, as he now almost felt, his vision?

It would have been absurd of him to trace into ramifications the

effect of the ribbon from which Miss Gostrey's trinket depended,

had he not for the hour, at the best, been so given over to

uncontrolled perceptions. What was it but an uncontrolled

perception that his friend's velvet band somehow added, in her

appearance, to the value of every other item--to that of her smile

and of the way she carried her head, to that of her complexion, of

her lips, her teeth, her eyes, her hair? What, certainly, had a man

conscious of a man's work in the world to do with red velvet bands?

He wouldn't for anything have so exposed himself as to tell Miss

Gostrey how much he liked hers, yet he HAD none the less not only

caught himself in the act--frivolous, no doubt, idiotic, and above

all unexpected--of liking it: he had in addition taken it as a

starting-point for fresh backward, fresh forward, fresh lateral

flights. The manner in which Mrs. Newsome's throat WAS encircled

suddenly represented for him, in an alien order, almost as many

things as the manner in which Miss Gostrey's was. Mrs. Newsome

wore, at operatic hours, a black silk dress--very handsome, he knew

it was "handsome"--and an ornament that his memory was able further

to identify as a ruche. He had his association indeed with the

ruche, but it was rather imperfectly romantic. He had once said to

the wearer--and it was as "free" a remark as he had ever made to

her--that she looked, with her ruff and other matters, like Queen

Elizabeth; and it had after this in truth been his fancy that, as a

consequence of that tenderness and an acceptance of the idea, the

form of this special tribute to the "frill" had grown slightly more

marked. The connexion, as he sat there and let his imagination

roam, was to strike him as vaguely pathetic; but there it all was,

and pathetic was doubtless in the conditions the best thing it

could possibly be. It had assuredly existed at any rate; for it

seemed now to come over him that no gentleman of his age at

Woollett could ever, to a lady of Mrs. Newsome's, which was not

much less than his, have embarked on such a simile.

All sorts of things in fact now seemed to come over him,

comparatively few of which his chronicler can hope for space to

mention. It came over him for instance that Miss Gostrey looked

perhaps like Mary Stuart: Lambert Strether had a candour of fancy

which could rest for an instant gratified in such an antithesis. It

came over him that never before--no, literally never--had a lady

dined with him at a public place before going to the play. The

publicity of the place was just, in the matter, for Strether, the

rare strange thing; it affected him almost as the achievement of

privacy might have affected a man of a different experience. He had

married, in the far-away years, so young as to have missed the time

natural in Boston for taking girls to the Museum; and it was

absolutely true of hint that--even after the close of the period of

conscious detachment occupying the centre of his life, the grey

middle desert of the two deaths, that of his wife and that, ten

years later, of his boy--he had never taken any one anywhere. It

came over him in especial--though the monition had, as happened,

already sounded, fitfully gleamed, in other forms--that the

business he had come out on hadn't yet been so brought home to him

as by the sight of the people about him. She gave him the

impression, his friend, at first, more straight than he got it for

himself--gave it simply by saying with off-hand illumination: "Oh

yes, they're types!"--but after he had taken it he made to the full

his own use of it; both while he kept silence for the four acts and

while he talked in the intervals. It was an evening, it was a world

of types, and this was a connexion above all in which the figures

and faces in the stalls were interchangeable with those on the

stage.

He felt as if the play itself penetrated him with the naked elbow

of his neighbour, a great stripped handsome red-haired lady who

conversed with a gentleman on her other side in stray dissyllables

which had for his ear, in the oddest way in the world, so much

sound that he wondered they hadn't more sense; and he recognised by

the same law, beyond the footlights, what he was pleased to take

for the very flush of English life. He had distracted drops in

which he couldn't have said if it were actors or auditors who were

most true, and the upshot of which, each time, was the consciousness

of new contacts. However he viewed his job it was "types" he should

have to tackle. Those before him and around him were not as the

types of Woollett, where, for that matter, it had begun to seem to

him that there must only have been the male and the female.

These made two exactly, even with the individual varieties. Here,

on the other hand, apart from the personal and the sexual range--

which might be greater or less--a series of strong stamps had been

applied, as it were, from without; stamps that his observation

played with as, before a glass case on a table, it might have

passed from medal to medal and from copper to gold. It befell that

in the drama precisely there was a bad woman in a yellow frock who

made a pleasant weak good-looking young man in perpetual evening

dress do the most dreadful things. Strether felt himself on the

whole not afraid of the yellow frock, but he was vaguely anxious

over a certain kindness into which he found himself drifting for

its victim. He hadn't come out, he reminded himself, to be too

kind, or indeed to be kind at all, to Chadwick Newsome. Would Chad

also be in perpetual evening dress? He somehow rather hoped it--it

seemed so to add to THIS young man's general amenability; though he

wondered too if, to fight him with his own weapons, he himself (a

thought almost startling) would have likewise to be. This young man

furthermore would have been much more easy to handle--at least for

HIM--than appeared probable in respect to Chad.

It came up for him with Miss Gostrey that there were things of

which she would really perhaps after all have heard, and she admitted

when a little pressed that she was never quite sure of what she

heard as distinguished from things such as, on occasions like

the present, she only extravagantly guessed. "I seem with this

freedom, you see, to have guessed Mr. Chad. He's a young man on

whose head high hopes are placed at Woollett; a young man a wicked

woman has got hold of and whom his family over there have sent you

out to rescue. You've accepted the mission of separating him from

the wicked woman. Are you quite sure she's very bad for him?"

Something in his manner showed it as quite pulling him up. "Of

course we are. Wouldn't YOU be?"

"Oh I don't know. One never does--does one?--beforehand. One can

only judge on the facts. Yours are quite new to me; I'm really not

in the least, as you see, in possession of them: so it will be

awfully interesting to have them from you. If you're satisfied,

that's all that's required. I mean if you're sure you ARE sure:

sure it won't do."

"That he should lead such a life? Rather!"

"Oh but I don't know, you see, about his life; you've not told me

about his life. She may be charming--his life!"

"Charming?"--Strether stared before him. "She's base, venal-out of

the streets."

"I see. And HE--?"

"Chad, wretched boy?"

"Of what type and temper is he?" she went on as Strether had

lapsed.

"Well--the obstinate." It was as if for a moment he had been going

to say more and had then controlled himself.

That was scarce what she wished. "Do you like him?"

This time he was prompt. "No. How CAN I?"

"Do you mean because of your being so saddled with him?"

"I'm thinking of his mother," said Strether after a moment. "He has

darkened her admirable life." He spoke with austerity. "He has

worried her half to death."

"Oh that's of course odious." She had a pause as if for renewed

emphasis of this truth, but it ended on another note. "Is her life

very admirable?"

"Extraordinarily."

There was so much in the tone that Miss Gostrey had to devote

another pause to the appreciation of it. "And has he only HER? I

don't mean the bad woman in Paris," she quickly added--"for I

assure you I shouldn't even at the best be disposed to allow him

more than one. But has he only his mother?"

"He has also a sister, older than himself and married; and they're

both remarkably fine women."

"Very handsome, you mean?"

This promptitude--almost, as he might have thought, this

precipitation, gave him a brief drop; but he came up again.

"Mrs. Newsome, I think, is handsome, though she's not of course,

with a son of twenty-eight and a daughter of thirty, in her very

first youth. She married, however, extremely young."

"And is wonderful," Miss Gostrey asked, "for her age?"

Strether seemed to feel with a certain disquiet the pressure of it.

"I don't say she's wonderful. Or rather," he went on the next moment,

"I do say it. It's exactly what she IS--wonderful. But I wasn't

thinking of her appearance," he explained--"striking as that doubtless

is. I was thinking--well, of many other things." He seemed to look at

these as if to mention some of them; then took, pulling himself up,

another turn. "About Mrs. Pocock people may differ."

"Is that the daughter's name--'Pocock'?"

"That's the daughter's name," Strether sturdily confessed.

"And people may differ, you mean, about HER beauty?"

"About everything."

"But YOU admire her?"

He gave his friend a glance as to show how he could bear this "I'm

perhaps a little afraid of her."

"Oh," said Miss Gostrey, "I see her from here! You may say then I

see very fast and very far, but I've already shown you I do. The

young man and the two ladies," she went on, "are at any rate all

the family?"

"Quite all. His father has been dead ten years, and there's no

brother, nor any other sister. They'd do," said Strether, "anything

in the world for him."

"And you'd do anything in the world for THEM?"

He shifted again; she had made it perhaps just a shade too affirmative

for his nerves. "Oh I don't know!"

"You'd do at any rate this, and the 'anything' they'd do is

represented by their MAKING you do it."

"Ah they couldn't have come--either of them. They're very busy

people and Mrs. Newsome in particular has a large full life. She's

moreover highly nervous--and not at all strong."

"You mean she's an American invalid?"

He carefully distinguished. "There's nothing she likes less than to

be called one, but she would consent to be one of those things, I

think," he laughed, "if it were the only way to be the other."

"Consent to be an American in order to be an invalid?"

"No," said Strether, "the other way round. She's at any rate

delicate sensitive high-strung. She puts so much of herself into

everything--"

Ah Maria knew these things! "That she has nothing left for anything

else? Of course she hasn't. To whom do you say it? High-strung?

Don't I spend my life, for them, jamming down the pedal? I see

moreover how it has told on you."

Strether took this more lightly. "Oh I jam down the pedal too!"

"Well," she lucidly returned, "we must from this moment bear on it

together with all our might." And she forged ahead. "Have they

money?"

But it was as if, while her energetic image still held him, her

enquiry fell short. "Mrs. Newsome," he wished further to explain,

"hasn't moreover your courage on the question of contact. If she

had come it would have been to see the person herself."

"The woman? Ah but that's courage."

"No--it's exaltation, which is a very different thing. Courage,"

he, however, accommodatingly threw out, "is what YOU have."

She shook her head. "You say that only to patch me up--to cover the

nudity of my want of exaltation. I've neither the one nor the

other. I've mere battered indifference. I see that what you mean,"

Miss Gostrey pursued, "is that if your friend HAD come she would

take great views, and the great views, to put it simply, would be

too much for her."

Strether looked amused at her notion of the simple, but he adopted

her formula. "Everything's too much for her."

"Ah then such a service as this of yours--"

"Is more for her than anything else? Yes--far more. But so long as

it isn't too much for ME--!"

"Her condition doesn't matter? Surely not; we leave her condition

out; we take it, that is, for granted. I see it, her condition, as

behind and beneath you; yet at the same time I see it as bearing

you up."

"Oh it does bear me up!" Strether laughed.

"Well then as yours bears ME nothing more's needed." With which she

put again her question. "Has Mrs. Newsome money?"

This time he heeded. "Oh plenty. That's the root of the evil.

There's money, to very large amounts, in the concern. Chad has had

the free use of a great deal. But if he'll pull himself together

and come home, all the same, he'll find his account in it."

She had listened with all her interest. "And I hope to goodness

you'll find yours!"

"He'll take up his definite material reward," said Strether without

acknowledgement of this. "He's at the parting of the ways. He can

come into the business now--he can't come later."

"Is there a business?"

"Lord, yes--a big brave bouncing business. A roaring trade."

"A great shop?"

"Yes--a workshop; a great production, a great industry. The

concern's a manufacture--and a manufacture that, if it's only

properly looked after, may well be on the way to become a monopoly.

It's a little thing they make--make better, it appears, than other

people can, or than other people, at any rate, do. Mr. Newsome,

being a man of ideas, at least in that particular line," Strether

explained, "put them on it with great effect, and gave the place

altogether, in his time, an immense lift."

"It's a place in itself?"

"Well, quite a number of buildings; almost a little industrial

colony. But above all it's a thing. The article produced."

"And what IS the article produced?"

Strether looked about him as in slight reluctance to say; then the

curtain, which he saw about to rise, came to his aid. "I'll tell

you next time." But when the next time came he only said he'd tell

her later on--after they should have left the theatre; for she had

immediately reverted to their topic, and even for himself the

picture of the stage was now overlaid with another image. His

postponements, however, made her wonder--wonder if the article

referred to were anything bad. And she explained that she meant

improper or ridiculous or wrong. But Strether, so far as that went,

could satisfy her. "Unmentionable? Oh no, we constantly talk of it;

we are quite familiar and brazen about it. Only, as a small,

trivial, rather ridiculous object of the commonest domestic use,

it's just wanting in-what shall I say? Well, dignity, or the least

approach to distinction. Right here therefore, with everything

about us so grand--!" In short he shrank.

"It's a false note?"

"Sadly. It's vulgar."

"But surely not vulgarer than this." Then on his wondering as she

herself had done: "Than everything about us." She seemed a trifle

irritated. "What do you take this for?"

"Why for--comparatively--divine! "

"This dreadful London theatre? It's impossible, if you really want

to know."

"Oh then," laughed Strether, "I DON'T really want to know!"

It made between them a pause, which she, however, still fascinated

by the mystery of the production at Woollett, presently broke.

"'Rather ridiculous'? Clothes-pins? Saleratus? Shoe-polish?"

It brought him round. "No--you don't even 'burn.' I don't think,

you know, you'll guess it."

"How then can I judge how vulgar it is?"

"You'll judge when I do tell you"--and he persuaded her to

patience. But it may even now frankly be mentioned that he in the

sequel never WAS to tell her. He actually never did so, and it

moreover oddly occurred that by the law, within her, of the

incalculable, her desire for the information dropped and her

attitude to the question converted itself into a positive

cultivation of ignorance. In ignorance she could humour her fancy,

and that proved a useful freedom. She could treat the little

nameless object as indeed unnameable--she could make their

abstention enormously definite. There might indeed have been for

Strether the portent of this in what she next said.

"Is it perhaps then because it's so bad--because your industry as

you call it, IS so vulgar--that Mr. Chad won't come back? Does he

feel the taint? Is he staying away not to be mixed up in it?"

"Oh," Strether laughed, "it wouldn't appear--would it?--that he

feels 'taints'! He's glad enough of the money from it, and the

money's his whole basis. There's appreciation in that--I mean as to

the allowance his mother has hitherto made him. She has of course

the resource of cutting this allowance off; but even then he has

unfortunately, and on no small scale, his independent supply--money

left him by his grandfather, her own father."

"Wouldn't the fact you mention then," Miss Gostrey asked, "make it

just more easy for him to be particular? Isn't he conceivable as

fastidious about the source--the apparent and public source--of his

income?"

Strether was able quite good-humouredly to entertain the

proposition. "The source of his grandfather's wealth--and thereby

of his own share in it--was not particularly noble."

"And what source was it?"

Strether cast about. "Well--practices."

"In business? Infamies? He was an old swindler?"

"Oh," he said with more emphasis than spirit, "I shan't describe

HIM nor narrate his exploits."

"Lord, what abysses! And the late Mr. Newsome then?"

"Well, what about him?"

"Was he like the grandfather?"

"No--he was on the other side of the house. And he was different."

Miss Gostrey kept it up. "Better?"

Her friend for a moment hung fire. "No."

Her comment on his hesitation was scarce the less marked for being

mute. "Thank you. NOW don't you see," she went on, "why the boy

doesn't come home? He's drowning his shame."

"His shame? What shame?"

"What shame? Comment donc? THE shame."

"But where and when," Strether asked, "is 'THE shame'--where is any

shame--to-day? The men I speak of--they did as every one does; and

(besides being ancient history) it was all a matter of appreciation."

She showed how she understood. "Mrs. Newsome has appreciated?"

"Ah I can't speak for HER!"

"In the midst of such doings--and, as I understand you, profiting

by them, she at least has remained exquisite?"

"Oh I can't talk of her!" Strether said.

"I thought she was just what you COULD talk of. You DON'T trust

me," Miss Gostrey after a moment declared.

It had its effect. "Well, her money is spent, her life conceived

and carried on with a large beneficence--"

"That's a kind of expiation of wrongs? Gracious," she added before

he could speak, "how intensely you make me see her!"

"If you see her," Strether dropped, "it's all that's necessary."

She really seemed to have her. "I feel that. She IS, in spite of

everything, handsome."

This at least enlivened him. "What do you mean by everything?"

"Well, I mean YOU." With which she had one of her swift changes of

ground. "You say the concern needs looking after; but doesn't

Mrs. Newsome look after it?"

"So far as possible. She's wonderfully able, but it's not her

affair, and her life's a good deal overcharged. She has many,

many things."

"And you also?"

"Oh yes--I've many too, if you will."

"I see. But what I mean is," Miss Gostrey amended, "do you also

look after the business?"

"Oh no, I don't touch the business."

"Only everything else?"

"Well, yes--some things."

"As for instance--?"

Strether obligingly thought. "Well, the Review."

"The Review?--you have a Review?"

"Certainly. Woollett has a Review--which Mrs. Newsome, for the

most part, magnificently pays for and which I, not at all

magnificently, edit. My name's on the cover," Strether pursued,

"and I'm really rather disappointed and hurt that you seem never

to have heard of it."

She neglected for a moment this grievance. "And what kind of a

Review is it?"

His serenity was now completely restored. "Well, it's green."

"Do you mean in political colour as they say here--in thought?"

"No; I mean the cover's green--of the most lovely shade."

"And with Mrs. Newsome's name on it too?"

He waited a little. "Oh as for that you must judge if she peeps

out. She's behind the whole thing; but she's of a delicacy and a

discretion--!"

Miss Gostrey took it all. "I'm sure. She WOULD be. I don't

underrate her. She must be rather a swell."

"Oh yes, she's rather a swell!"

"A Woollett swell--bon! I like the idea of a Woollett swell. And

you must be rather one too, to be so mixed up with her."

"Ah no," said Strether, "that's not the way it works."

But she had already taken him up. "The way it works--you needn't

tell me!--is of course that you efface yourself."

"With my name on the cover?" he lucidly objected.

"Ah but you don't put it on for yourself."

"I beg your pardon--that's exactly what I do put it on for. It's

exactly the thing that I'm reduced to doing for myself. It seems

to rescue a little, you see, from the wreck of hopes and ambitions,

the refuse-heap of disappointments and failures, my one presentable

little scrap of an identity."

On this she looked at him as to say many things, but what she at

last simply said was: "She likes to see it there. You're the

bigger swell of the two," she immediately continued, "because you

think you're not one. She thinks she IS one. However," Miss

Gostrey added, "she thinks you're one too. You're at all events

the biggest she can get hold of." She embroidered, she abounded.

"I don't say it to interfere between you, but on the day she gets

hold of a bigger one--!" Strether had thrown back his head as in

silent mirth over something that struck him in her audacity or

felicity, and her flight meanwhile was already higher. "Therefore

close with her--!"

"Close with her?" he asked as she seemed to hang poised.

"Before you lose your chance."

Their eyes met over it. "What do you mean by closing?"

"And what do I mean by your chance? I'll tell you when you tell me

all the things YOU don't. Is it her GREATEST fad?" she briskly

pursued.

"The Review?" He seemed to wonder how he could best describe it.

This resulted however but in a sketch. "It's her tribute to the

ideal."

"I see. You go in for tremendous things."

"We go in for the unpopular side--that is so far as we dare."

"And how far DO you dare?"

"Well, she very far. I much less. I don't begin to have her faith.

She provides," said Strether, "three fourths of that. And she

provides, as I've confided to you, ALL the money."

It evoked somehow a vision of gold that held for a little Miss

Gostrey's eyes, and she looked as if she heard the bright dollars

shovelled in. "I hope then you make a good thing--"

"I NEVER made a good thing!" he at once returned.

She just waited. "Don't you call it a good thing to be loved?"

"Oh we're not loved. We're not even hated. We're only just sweetly

ignored."

She had another pause. "You don't trust me!" she once more repeated.

"Don't I when I lift the last veil?--tell you the very secret of

the prison-house?"

Again she met his eyes, but to the result that after an instant

her own turned away with impatience. "You don't sell? Oh I'm glad

of THAT!" After which however, and before he could protest, she was

off again. "She's just a MORAL swell."

He accepted gaily enough the definition. "Yes--I really think that

describes her."

But it had for his friend the oddest connexion. "How does she do

her hair?"

He laughed out. "Beautifully!"

"Ah that doesn't tell me. However, it doesn't matter--I know. It's

tremendously neat--a real reproach; quite remarkably thick and

without, as yet, a single strand of white. There!"

He blushed for her realism, but gaped at her truth. "You're the

very deuce."

"What else SHOULD I be? It was as the very deuce I pounced on you.

But don't let it trouble you, for everything but the very deuce--

at our age--is a bore and a delusion, and even he himself, after all,

but half a joy." With which, on a single sweep of her wing, she

resumed. "You assist her to expiate--which is rather hard when

you've yourself not sinned."

"It's she who hasn't sinned," Strether replied. "I've sinned the

most."

"Ah," Miss Gostrey cynically laughed, "what a picture of HER!

Have you robbed the widow and the orphan?"

"I've sinned enough," said Strether.

"Enough for whom? Enough for what?"

"Well, to be where I am."

"Thank you!" They were disturbed at this moment by the passage

between their knees and the back of the seats before them of a

gentleman who had been absent during a part of the performance and

who now returned for the close; but the interruption left Miss

Gostrey time, before the subsequent hush, to express as a sharp

finality her sense of the moral of all their talk. "I knew you had

something up your sleeve!" This finality, however, left them in its

turn, at the end of the play, as disposed to hang back as if they

had still much to say; so that they easily agreed to let every one

go before them--they found an interest in waiting. They made out

from the lobby that the night had turned to rain; yet Miss Gostrey

let her friend know that he wasn't to see her home. He was simply

to put her, by herself, into a four-wheeler; she liked so in

London, of wet nights after wild pleasures, thinking things over,

on the return, in lonely four-wheelers. This was her great time,

she intimated, for pulling herself together. The delays caused by

the weather, the struggle for vehicles at the door, gave them

occasion to subside on a divan at the back of the vestibule and

just beyond the reach of the fresh damp gusts from the street. Here

Strether's comrade resumed that free handling of the subject to

which his own imagination of it already owed so much. "Does your

young friend in Paris like you?"

It had almost, after the interval, startled him. "Oh I hope not!

Why SHOULD he?"

"Why shouldn't he?" Miss Gostrey asked. "That you're coming down on

him need have nothing to do with it."

"You see more in it," he presently returned, "than I."

"Of course I see you in it."

"Well then you see more in 'me'!"

"Than you see in yourself? Very likely. That's always one's right.

What I was thinking of," she explained, "is the possible particular

effect on him of his milieu."

"Oh his milieu--!" Strether really felt he could imagine it better

now than three hours before.

"Do you mean it can only have been so lowering?"

"Why that's my very starting-point."

"Yes, but you start so far back. What do his letters say?"

"Nothing. He practically ignores us--or spares us. He doesn't

write."

"I see. But there are all the same," she went on, "two quite

distinct things that--given the wonderful place he's in--may have

happened to him. One is that he may have got brutalised. The other

is that he may have got refined."

Strether stared--this WAS a novelty. "Refined?"

"Oh," she said quietly, "there ARE refinements."

The way of it made him, after looking at her, break into a laugh.

"YOU have them!"

"As one of the signs," she continued in the same tone, "they

constitute perhaps the worst."

He thought it over and his gravity returned. "Is it a refinement

not to answer his mother's letters?"

She appeared to have a scruple, but she brought it out. "Oh I

should say the greatest of all."

"Well," said Strether, "I'M quite content to let it, as one of the

signs, pass for the worst that I know he believes he can do what he

likes with me."

This appeared to strike her. "How do you know it?"

"Oh I'm sure of it. I feel it in my bones."

"Feel he CAN do it?"

"Feel that he believes he can. It may come to the same thing!"

Strether laughed.

She wouldn't, however, have this. "Nothing for you will ever come

to the same thing as anything else." And she understood what she

meant, it seemed, sufficiently to go straight on. "You say that if

he does break he'll come in for things at home?"

"Quite positively. He'll come in for a particular chance--a chance

that any properly constituted young man would jump at. The

business has so developed that an opening scarcely apparent three

years ago, but which his father's will took account of as in

certain conditions possible and which, under that will, attaches

to Chad's availing himself of it a large contingent advantage--

this opening, the conditions having come about, now simply awaits

him. His mother has kept it for him, holding out against strong

pressure, till the last possible moment. It requires, naturally,

as it carries with it a handsome 'part,' a large share in profits,

his being on the spot and making a big effort for a big result.

That's what I mean by his chance. If he misses it he comes in, as

you say, for nothing. And to see that he doesn't miss it is, in a

word, what I've come out for."

She let it all sink in. "What you've come out for then is simply

to render him an immense service."

Well, poor Strether was willing to take it so. "Ah if you like."

"He stands, as they say, if you succeed with him, to gain--"

"Oh a lot of advantages." Strether had them clearly at his

fingers' ends.

"By which you mean of course a lot of money."

"Well, not only. I'm acting with a sense for him of other things

too. Consideration and comfort and security--the general safety of

being anchored by a strong chain. He wants, as I see him, to be

protected. Protected I mean from life."

"Ah voila!"--her thought fitted with a click. "From life. What you

REALLY want to get him home for is to marry him."

"Well, that's about the size of it."

"Of course," she said, "it's rudimentary. But to any one in

particular?"

He smiled at this, looking a little more conscious. "You get

everything out."

For a moment again their eyes met. "You put everything in!"

He acknowledged the tribute by telling her. "To Mamie Pocock."

She wondered; then gravely, even exquisitely, as if to make the

oddity also fit: "His own niece?"

"Oh you must yourself find a name for the relation. His

brother-in-law's sister. Mrs. Jim's sister-in-law."

It seemed to have on Miss Gostrey a certain hardening effect. "And

who in the world's Mrs. Jim?"

"Chad's sister--who was Sarah Newsome. She's married--didn't I

mention it?--to Jim Pocock."

"Ah yes," she tacitly replied; but he had mentioned things--!

Then, however, with all the sound it could have, "Who in the

world's Jim Pocock?" she asked.

"Why Sally's husband. That's the only way we distinguish people at

Woollett," he good-humoredly explained.

"And is it a great distinction--being Sally's husband?"

He considered. "I think there can be scarcely a greater--unless it

may become one, in the future, to be Chad's wife."

"Then how do they distinguish YOU?"

"They DON'T--except, as I've told you, by the green cover."

Once more their eyes met on it, and she held him an instant. "The

green cover won't--nor will ANY cover--avail you with ME. You're

of a depth of duplicity!" Still, she could in her own large grasp

of the real condone it. "Is Mamie a great parti?"

"Oh the greatest we have--our prettiest brightest girl."

Miss Gostrey seemed to fix the poor child. "I know what they CAN

be. And with money?"

"Not perhaps with a great deal of that--but with so much of

everything else that we don't miss it. We DON'T miss money much,

you know," Strether added, "in general, in America, in pretty

girls."

"No," she conceded; "but I know also what you do sometimes miss.

And do you," she asked, "yourself admire her?"

It was a question, he indicated, that there might be several ways

of taking; but he decided after an instant for the humorous.

"Haven't I sufficiently showed you how I admire ANY pretty girl?';

Her interest in his problem was by this time such that it scarce

left her freedom, and she kept close to the facts. "I supposed

that at Woollett you wanted them--what shall I call it?--

blameless. I mean your young men for your pretty girls."

"So did I!" Strether confessed. "But you strike there a curious

fact--the fact that Woollett too accommodates itself to the spirit

of the age and the increasing mildness of manners. Everything

changes, and I hold that our situation precisely marks a date. We

SHOULD prefer them blameless, but we have to make the best of them

as we find them. Since the spirit of the age and the increasing

mildness send them so much more to Paris--"

"You've to take them back as they come. When they DO come. Bon!"

Once more she embraced it all, but she had a moment of thought.

"Poor Chad!"

"Ah," said Strether cheerfully "Mamie will save him!"

She was looking away, still in her vision, and she spoke with

impatience and almost as if he hadn't understood her. "YOU'LL save

him. That's who'll save him."

"Oh but with Mamie's aid. Unless indeed you mean," he added, "that

I shall effect so much more with yours!"

It made her at last again look at him. "You'll do more--as you're

so much better--than all of us put together."

"I think I'm only better since I've known YOU!" Strether bravely

returned.

The depletion of the place, the shrinkage of the crowd and now

comparatively quiet withdrawal of its last elements had already

brought them nearer the door and put them in relation with a

messenger of whom he bespoke Miss Gostrey's cab. But this left

them a few minutes more, which she was clearly in no mood not to

use. "You've spoken to me of what--by your success--Mr. Chad

stands to gain. But you've not spoken to me of what you do."

"Oh I've nothing more to gain," said Strether very simply.

She took it as even quite too simple. "You mean you've got it all

'down'? You've been paid in advance?"

"Ah don't talk about payment!" he groaned.

Something in the tone of it pulled her up, but as their messenger

still delayed she had another chance and she put it in another

way. "What--by failure--do you stand to lose?"

He still, however, wouldn't have it. "Nothing!" he exclaimed, and

on the messenger's at this instant reappearing he was able to sink

the subject in their responsive advance. When, a few steps up the

street, under a lamp, he had put her into her four-wheeler and she

had asked him if the man had called for him no second conveyance,

he replied before the door was closed. "You won't take me with

you?"

"Not for the world."

"Then I shall walk."

"In the rain?"

"I like the rain," said Strether. "Good-night!"

She kept him a moment, while his hand was on the door, by not

answering; after which she answered by repeating her question.

"What do you stand to lose?"

Why the question now affected him as other he couldn't have said;

he could only this time meet it otherwise. "Everything."

"So I thought. Then you shall succeed. And to that end I'm yours--"

"Ah, dear lady!" he kindly breathed.

"Till death!" said Maria Gostrey. "Good-night."

II

Strether called, his second morning in Paris, on the bankers of

the Rue Scribe to whom his letter of credit was addressed, and he

made this visit attended by Waymarsh, in whose company he had

crossed from London two days before. They had hastened to the Rue

Scribe on the morrow of their arrival, but Strether had not then

found the letters the hope of which prompted this errand. He had

had as yet none at all; hadn't expected them in London, but had

counted on several in Paris, and, disconcerted now, had presently

strolled back to the Boulevard with a sense of injury that he felt

himself taking for as good a start as any other. It would serve,

this spur to his spirit, he reflected, as, pausing at the top of

the street, he looked up and down the great foreign avenue, it

would serve to begin business with. His idea was to begin business

immediately, and it did much for him the rest of his day that the

beginning of business awaited him. He did little else till night

but ask himself what he should do if he hadn't fortunately had so

much to do; but he put himself the question in many different

situations and connexions. What carried him hither and yon was an

admirable theory that nothing he could do wouldn't be in some

manner related to what he fundamentally had on hand, or WOULD be--

should he happen to have a scruple--wasted for it. He did happen

to have a scruple--a scruple about taking no definite step till he

should get letters; but this reasoning carried it off. A single

day to feel his feet--he had felt them as yet only at Chester and

in London--was he could consider, none too much; and having, as he

had often privately expressed it, Paris to reckon with, he threw

these hours of freshness consciously into the reckoning. They made

it continually greater, but that was what it had best be if it was

to be anything at all, and he gave himself up till far into the

evening, at the theatre and on the return, after the theatre,

along the bright congested Boulevard, to feeling it grow. Waymarsh

had accompanied him this time to the play, and the two men had

walked together, as a first stage, from the Gymnase to the Cafe

Riche, into the crowded "terrace" of which establishment--the

night, or rather the morning, for midnight had struck, being bland

and populous--they had wedged themselves for refreshment.

Waymarsh, as a result of some discussion with his friend, had made

a marked virtue of his having now let himself go; and there had

been elements of impression in their half-hour over their watered

beer-glasses that gave him his occasion for conveying that he held

this compromise with his stiffer self to have become extreme. He

conveyed it--for it was still, after all, his stiffer self who

gloomed out of the glare of the terrace--in solemn silence; and

there was indeed a great deal of critical silence, every way,

between the companions, even till they gained the Place de l'Opera,

as to the character of their nocturnal progress.

This morning there WERE letters--letters which had reached London,

apparently all together, the day of Strether's journey, and had

taken their time to follow him; so that, after a controlled

impulse to go into them in the reception-room of the bank, which,

reminding him of the post-office at Woollett, affected him as the

abutment of some transatlantic bridge, he slipped them into the

pocket of his loose grey overcoat with a sense of the felicity of

carrying them off. Waymarsh, who had had letters yesterday, had

had them again to-day, and Waymarsh suggested in this particular

no controlled impulses. The last one he was at all events likely

to be observed to struggle with was clearly that of bringing to a

premature close any visit to the Rue Scribe. Strether had left him

there yesterday; he wanted to see the papers, and he had spent, by

what his friend could make out, a succession of hours with the

papers. He spoke of the establishment, with emphasis, as a post of

superior observation; just as he spoke generally of his actual

damnable doom as a device for hiding from him what was going on.

Europe was best described, to his mind, as an elaborate engine for

dissociating the confined American from that indispensable

knowledge, and was accordingly only rendered bearable by these

occasional stations of relief, traps for the arrest of wandering

western airs. Strether, on his side, set himself to walk again--he

had his relief in his pocket; and indeed, much as he had desired

his budget, the growth of restlessness might have been marked in

him from the moment he had assured himself of the superscription

of most of the missives it contained. This restlessness became

therefore his temporary law; he knew he should recognise as soon

as see it the best place of all for settling down with his chief

correspondent. He had for the next hour an accidental air of

looking for it in the windows of shops; he came down the Rue de la

Paix in the sun and, passing across the Tuileries and the river,

indulged more than once--as if on finding himself determined--in a

sudden pause before the book-stalls of the opposite quay. In the

garden of the Tuileries he had lingered, on two or three spots, to

look; it was as if the wonderful Paris spring had stayed him as he

roamed. The prompt Paris morning struck its cheerful notes--in a

soft breeze and a sprinkled smell, in the light flit, over the

garden-floor, of bareheaded girls with the buckled strap of oblong

boxes, in the type of ancient thrifty persons basking betimes

where terrace-walls were warm, in the blue-frocked brass-labelled

officialism of humble rakers and scrapers, in the deep references

of a straight-pacing priest or the sharp ones of a white-gaitered

red-legged soldier. He watched little brisk figures, figures whose

movement was as the tick of the great Paris clock, take their

smooth diagonal from point to point; the air had a taste as of

something mixed with art, something that presented nature as a

white-capped master-chef. The palace was gone, Strether remembered

the palace; and when he gazed into the irremediable void of its

site the historic sense in him might have been freely at play--the

play under which in Paris indeed it so often winces like a touched

nerve. He filled out spaces with dim symbols of scenes; he caught

the gleam of white statues at the base of which, with his letters

out, he could tilt back a straw-bottomed chair. But his drift was,

for reasons, to the other side, and it floated him unspent up the

Rue de Seine and as far as the Luxembourg. In the Luxembourg

Gardens he pulled up; here at last he found his nook, and here, on

a penny chair from which terraces, alleys, vistas, fountains,

little trees in green tubs, little women in white caps and shrill

little girls at play all sunnily "composed" together, he passed an

hour in which the cup of his impressions seemed truly to overflow.

But a week had elapsed since he quitted the ship, and there were

more things in his mind than so few days could account for. More

than once, during the time, he had regarded himself as admonished;

but the admonition this morning was formidably sharp. It took as

it hadn't done yet the form of a question--the question of what he

was doing with such an extraordinary sense of escape. This sense

was sharpest after he had read his letters, but that was also

precisely why the question pressed. Four of the letters were from

Mrs. Newsome and none of them short; she had lost no time, had

followed on his heels while he moved, so expressing herself that

he now could measure the probable frequency with which he should

hear. They would arrive, it would seem, her communications, at the

rate of several a week; he should be able to count, it might even

prove, on more than one by each mail. If he had begun yesterday

with a small grievance he had therefore an opportunity to begin

to-day with its opposite. He read the letters successively and

slowly, putting others back into his pocket but keeping these for

a long time afterwards gathered in his lap. He held them there,

lost in thought, as if to prolong the presence of what they gave

him; or as if at the least to assure them their part in the

constitution of some lucidity. His friend wrote admirably, and her

tone was even more in her style than in her voice--he might

almost, for the hour, have had to come this distance to get its

full carrying quality; yet the plentitude of his consciousness of

difference consorted perfectly with the deepened intensity of the

connexion. It was the difference, the difference of being just

where he was and AS he was, that formed the escape--this

difference was so much greater than he had dreamed it would be;

and what he finally sat there turning over was the strange logic

of his finding himself so free. He felt it in a manner his duty to

think out his state, to approve the process, and when he came in

fact to trace the steps and add up the items they sufficiently

accounted for the sum. He had never expected--that was the truth

of it--again to find himself young, and all the years and other

things it had taken to make him so were exactly his present

arithmetic. He had to make sure of them to put his scruple to

rest.

It all sprang at bottom from the beauty of Mrs. Newsome's desire

that he should be worried with nothing that was not of the essence

of his task; by insisting that he should thoroughly intermit and

break she had so provided for his freedom that she would, as it

were, have only herself to thank. Strether could not at this point

indeed have completed his thought by the image of what she might

have to thank herself FOR: the image, at best, of his own

likeness-poor Lambert Strether washed up on the sunny strand by

the waves of a single day, poor Lambert Strether thankful for

breathing-time and stiffening himself while he gasped. There he

was, and with nothing in his aspect or his posture to scandalise:

it was only true that if he had seen Mrs. Newsome coming he would

instinctively have jumped up to walk away a little. He would have

come round and back to her bravely, but he would have had first to

pull himself together. She abounded in news of the situation at

home, proved to him how perfectly she was arranging for his

absence, told him who would take up this and who take up that

exactly where he had left it, gave him in fact chapter and verse

for the moral that nothing would suffer. It filled for him, this

tone of hers, all the air; yet it struck him at the same time as

the hum of vain things. This latter effect was what he tried to

justify--and with the success that, grave though the appearance,

he at last lighted on a form that was happy. He arrived at it by

the inevitable recognition of his having been a fortnight before

one of the weariest of men. If ever a man had come off tired

Lambert Strether was that man; and hadn't it been distinctly on

the ground of his fatigue that his wonderful friend at home had so

felt for him and so contrived? It seemed to him somehow at these

instants that, could he only maintain with sufficient firmness his

grasp of that truth, it might become in a manner his compass and

his helm. What he wanted most was some idea that would simplify,

and nothing would do this so much as the fact that he was done for

and finished. If it had been in such a light that he had just

detected in his cup the dregs of youth, that was a mere flaw of

the surface of his scheme. He was so distinctly fagged-out that it

must serve precisely as his convenience, and if he could but

consistently be good for little enough he might do everything he

wanted.

Everything he wanted was comprised moreover in a single boon--the

common unattainable art of taking things as they came. He appeared

to himself to have given his best years to an active appreciation

of the way they didn't come; but perhaps--as they would seemingly

here be things quite other--this long ache might at last drop to

rest. He could easily see that from the moment he should accept

the notion of his foredoomed collapse the last thing he would lack

would be reasons and memories. Oh if he SHOULD do the sum no slate

would hold the figures! The fact that he had failed, as he

considered, in everything, in each relation and in half a dozen

trades, as he liked luxuriously to put it, might have made, might

still make, for an empty present; but it stood solidly for a

crowded past. It had not been, so much achievement missed, a light

yoke nor a short load.[sic] It was at present as if the backward

picture had hung there, the long crooked course, grey in the

shadow of his solitude. It had been a dreadful cheerful sociable

solitude, a solitude of life or choice, of community; but though

there had been people enough all round it there had been but three

or four persons IN it. Waymarsh was one of these, and the fact

struck him just now as marking the record. Mrs. Newsome was

another, and Miss Gostrey had of a sudden shown signs of becoming

a third. Beyond, behind them was the pale figure of his real

youth, which held against its breast the two presences paler than

itself--the young wife he had early lost and the young son he had

stupidly sacrificed. He had again and again made out for himself

that he might have kept his little boy, his little dull boy who

had died at school of rapid diphtheria, if he had not in those

years so insanely given himself to merely missing the mother. It

was the soreness of his remorse that the child had in all

likelihood not really been dull--had been dull, as he had been

banished and neglected, mainly because the father had been

unwittingly selfish. This was doubtless but the secret habit of

sorrow, which had slowly given way to time; yet there remained an

ache sharp enough to make the spirit, at the sight now and again

of some fair young man just growing up, wince with the thought of

an opportunity lost. Had ever a man, he had finally fallen into

the way of asking himself, lost so much and even done so much for

so little? There had been particular reasons why all yesterday,

beyond other days, he should have had in one ear this cold

enquiry. His name on the green cover, where he had put it for Mrs.

Newsome, expressed him doubtless just enough to make the world--

the world as distinguished, both for more and for less, from

Woollett--ask who he was. He had incurred the ridicule of having

to have his explanation explained. He was Lambert Strether because

he was on the cover, whereas it should have been, for anything

like glory, that he was on the cover because he was Lambert

Strether. He would have done anything for Mrs. Newsome, have been

still more ridiculous--as he might, for that matter, have occasion

to be yet; which came to saying that this acceptance of fate was

all he had to show at fifty-five.

He judged the quantity as small because it WAS small, and all the

more egregiously since it couldn't, as he saw the case, so much as

thinkably have been larger. He hadn't had the gift of making the

most of what he tried, and if he had tried and tried again--no one

but himself knew how often--it appeared to have been that he might

demonstrate what else, in default of that, COULD be made. Old

ghosts of experiments came back to him, old drudgeries and

delusions, and disgusts, old recoveries with their relapses, old

fevers with their chills, broken moments of good faith, others of

still better doubt; adventures, for the most part, of the sort

qualified as lessons. The special spring that had constantly

played for him the day before was the recognition--frequent enough

to surprise him--of the promises to himself that he had after his

other visit never kept. The reminiscence to-day most quickened for

him was that of the vow taken in the course of the pilgrimage

that, newly-married, with the War just over, and helplessly young

in spite of it, he had recklessly made with the creature who was

so much younger still. It had been a bold dash, for which they had

taken money set apart for necessities, but kept sacred at the

moment in a hundred ways, and in none more so than by this private

pledge of his own to treat the occasion as a relation formed with

the higher culture and see that, as they said at Woollett, it

should bear a good harvest. He had believed, sailing home again,

that he had gained something great, and his theory--with an

elaborate innocent plan of reading, digesting, coming back even,

every few years--had then been to preserve, cherish and extend it.

As such plans as these had come to nothing, however, in respect to

acquisitions still more precious, it was doubtless little enough

of a marvel that he should have lost account of that handful of

seed. Buried for long years in dark corners at any rate these few

germs had sprouted again under forty-eight hours of Paris. The

process of yesterday had really been the process of feeling the

general stirred life of connexions long since individually

dropped. Strether had become acquainted even on this ground with

short gusts of speculation--sudden flights of fancy in Louvre

galleries, hungry gazes through clear plates behind which

lemon-coloured volumes were as fresh as fruit on the tree.

There were instants at which he could ask whether, since there had

been fundamentally so little question of his keeping anything, the

fate after all decreed for him hadn't been only to BE kept. Kept

for something, in that event, that he didn't pretend, didn't

possibly dare as yet to divine; something that made him hover and

wonder and laugh and sigh, made him advance and retreat, feeling

half ashamed of his impulse to plunge and more than half afraid of

his impulse to wait. He remembered for instance how he had gone

back in the sixties with lemon-coloured volumes in general on the

brain as well as with a dozen--selected for his wife too--in his

trunk; and nothing had at the moment shown more confidence than

this invocation of the finer taste. They were still somewhere at

home, the dozen--stale and soiled and never sent to the binder;

but what had become of the sharp initiation they represented? They

represented now the mere sallow paint on the door of the temple of

taste that he had dreamed of raising up--a structure he had

practically never carried further. Strether's present highest

flights were perhaps those in which this particular lapse figured

to him as a symbol, a symbol of his long grind and his want of odd

moments, his want moreover of money, of opportunity, of positive

dignity. That the memory of the vow of his youth should, in order

to throb again, have had to wait for this last, as he felt it, of

all his accidents--that was surely proof enough of how his

conscience had been encumbered. If any further proof were needed

it would have been to be found in the fact that, as he perfectly

now saw, he had ceased even to measure his meagreness, a

meagreness that sprawled, in this retrospect, vague and

comprehensive, stretching back like some unmapped Hinterland from

a rough coast-settlement. His conscience had been amusing itself

for the forty-eight hours by forbidding him the purchase of a

book; he held off from that, held off from everything; from the

moment he didn't yet call on Chad he wouldn't for the world have

taken any other step. On this evidence, however, of the way they

actually affected him he glared at the lemon-coloured covers in

confession of the subconsciousness that, all the same, in the

great desert of the years, he must have had of them. The green

covers at home comprised, by the law of their purpose, no tribute

to letters; it was of a mere rich kernel of economics, politics,

ethics that, glazed and, as Mrs. Newsome maintained rather against

HIS view, pre-eminently pleasant to touch, they formed the

specious shell. Without therefore any needed instinctive knowledge

of what was coming out, in Paris, on the bright highway, he struck

himself at present as having more than once flushed with a

suspicion: he couldn't otherwise at present be feeling so many

fears confirmed. There were "movements" he was too late for:

weren't they, with the fun of them, already spent? There were

sequences he had missed and great gaps in the procession: he might

have been watching it all recede in a golden cloud of dust. If the

playhouse wasn't closed his seat had at least fallen to somebody

else. He had had an uneasy feeling the night before that if he was

at the theatre at all--though he indeed justified the theatre, in

the specific sense, and with a grotesqueness to which his

imagination did all honour, as something he owed poor Waymarsh--he

should have been there with, and as might have been said, FOR

Chad.

This suggested the question of whether he could properly have

taken him to such a play, and what effect--it was a point that

suddenly rose--his peculiar responsibility might be held in

general to have on his choice of entertainment. It had literally

been present to him at the Gymnase--where one was held moreover

comparatively safe--that having his young friend at his side would

have been an odd feature of the work of redemption; and this quite

in spite of the fact that the picture presented might well,

confronted with Chad's own private stage, have seemed the pattern

of propriety. He clearly hadn't come out in the name of propriety

but to visit unattended equivocal performances; yet still less had

he done so to undermine his authority by sharing them with the

graceless youth. Was he to renounce all amusement for the sweet

sake of that authority? and WOULD such renouncement give him for

Chad a moral glamour? The little problem bristled the more by

reason of poor Strether's fairly open sense of the irony of

things. Were there then sides on which his predicament threatened

to look rather droll to him? Should he have to pretend to believe--

either to himself or the wretched boy--that there was anything

that could make the latter worse? Wasn't some such pretence on the

other hand involved in the assumption of possible processes that

would make him better? His greatest uneasiness seemed to peep at

him out of the imminent impression that almost any acceptance of

Paris might give one's authority away. It hung before him this

morning, the vast bright Babylon, like some huge iridescent

object, a jewel brilliant and hard, in which parts were not to be

discriminated nor differences comfortably marked. It twinkled and

trembled and melted together, and what seemed all surface one

moment seemed all depth the next. It was a place of which,

unmistakeably, Chad was fond; wherefore if he, Strether, should

like it too much, what on earth, with such a bond, would become of

either of them? It all depended of course--which was a gleam of

light--on how the "too much" was measured; though indeed our

friend fairly felt, while he prolonged the meditation I describe,

that for himself even already a certain measure had been reached.

It will have been sufficiently seen that he was not a man to

neglect any good chance for reflexion. Was it at all possible for

instance to like Paris enough without liking it too much? He

luckily however hadn't promised Mrs. Newsome not to like it at

all. He was ready to recognise at this stage that such an

engagement WOULD have tied his hands. The Luxembourg Gardens were

incontestably just so adorable at this hour by reason--in addition

to their intrinsic charm--of his not having taken it. The only

engagement he had taken, when he looked the thing in the face, was

to do what he reasonably could.

It upset him a little none the less and after a while to find

himself at last remembering on what current of association he had

been floated so far. Old imaginations of the Latin Quarter had

played their part for him, and he had duly recalled its having

been with this scene of rather ominous legend that, like so many

young men in fiction as well as in fact, Chad had begun. He was

now quite out of it, with his "home," as Strether figured the

place, in the Boulevard Malesherbes; which was perhaps why,

repairing, not to fail of justice either, to the elder

neighbourhood, our friend had felt he could allow for the element

of the usual, the immemorial, without courting perturbation. He

was not at least in danger of seeing the youth and the particular

Person flaunt by together; and yet he was in the very air of

which--just to feel what the early natural note must have been--he

wished most to take counsel. It became at once vivid to him that

he had originally had, for a few days, an almost envious vision of

the boy's romantic privilege. Melancholy Murger, with Francine and

Musette and Rodolphe, at home, in the company of the tattered,

one--if he not in his single self two or three--of the unbound,

the paper-covered dozen on the shelf; and when Chad had written,

five years ago, after a sojourn then already prolonged to six

months, that he had decided to go in for economy and the real

thing, Strether's fancy had quite fondly accompanied him in this

migration, which was to convey him, as they somewhat confusedly

learned at Woollett, across the bridges and up the Montagne

Sainte-Genevieve. This was the region--Chad had been quite

distinct about it--in which the best French, and many other

things, were to be learned at least cost, and in which all sorts

of clever fellows, compatriots there for a purpose, formed an

awfully pleasant set. The clever fellows, the friendly countrymen

were mainly young painters, sculptors, architects, medical

students; but they were, Chad sagely opined, a much more

profitable lot to be with--even on the footing of not being quite

one of them--than the "terrible toughs" (Strether remembered the

edifying discrimination) of the American bars and banks

roundabout the Opera. Chad had thrown out, in the communications

following this one--for at that time he did once in a while

communicate--that several members of a band of earnest workers

under one of the great artists had taken him right in, making him

dine every night, almost for nothing, at their place, and even

pressing him not to neglect the hypothesis of there being as much

"in him" as in any of them. There had been literally a moment at

which it appeared there might be something in him; there had been

at any rate a moment at which he had written that he didn't know

but what a month or two more might see him enrolled in some

atelier. The season had been one at which Mrs. Newsome was moved

to gratitude for small mercies; it had broken on them all as a

blessing that their absentee HAD perhaps a conscience--that he was

sated in fine with idleness, was ambitious of variety. The

exhibition was doubtless as yet not brilliant, but Strether

himself, even by that time much enlisted and immersed, had

determined, on the part of the two ladies, a temperate approval

and in fact, as he now recollected, a certain austere enthusiasm.

But the very next thing that happened had been a dark drop of the

curtain. The son and brother had not browsed long on the Montagne

Sainte-Genevieve--his effective little use of the name of which,

like his allusion to the best French, appeared to have been but

one of the notes of his rough cunning. The light refreshment of

these vain appearances had not accordingly carried any of them

very far. On the other hand it had gained Chad time; it had given

him a chance, unchecked, to strike his roots, had paved the way

for initiations more direct and more deep. It was Strether's

belief that he had been comparatively innocent before this first

migration, and even that the first effects of the migration would

not have been, without some particular bad accident, to have been

deplored. There had been three months--he had sufficiently figured

it out--in which Chad had wanted to try. He HAD tried, though not

very hard--he had had his little hour of good faith. The weakness

of this principle in him was that almost any accident attestedly

bad enough was stronger. Such had at any rate markedly been the

case for the precipitation of a special series of impressions.

They had proved, successively, these impressions--all of Musette

and Francine, but Musette and Francine vulgarised by the larger

evolution of the type--irresistibly sharp: he had "taken up," by

what was at the time to be shrinkingly gathered, as it was scantly

mentioned, with one ferociously "interested" little person after

another. Strether had read somewhere of a Latin motto, a

description of the hours, observed on a clock by a traveller in

Spain; and he had been led to apply it in thought to Chad's number

one, number two, number three. Omnes vulnerant, ultima necat--they

had all morally wounded, the last had morally killed. The last had

been longest in possession--in possession, that is, of whatever

was left of the poor boy's finer mortality. And it hadn't been

she, it had been one of her early predecessors, who had determined

the second migration, the expensive return and relapse, the

exchange again, as was fairly to be presumed, of the vaunted best

French for some special variety of the worst.

He pulled himself then at last together for his own progress back;

not with the feeling that he had taken his walk in vain. He

prolonged it a little, in the immediate neighbourhood, after he

had quitted his chair; and the upshot of the whole morning for him

was that his campaign had begun. He had wanted to put himself in

relation, and he would be hanged if he were NOT in relation. He

was that at no moment so much as while, under the old arches of

the Odeon, he lingered before the charming open-air array of

literature classic and casual. He found the effect of tone and

tint, in the long charged tables and shelves, delicate and

appetising; the impression--substituting one kind of low-priced

consommation for another--might have been that of one of the

pleasant cafes that overlapped, under an awning, to the pavement;

but he edged along, grazing the tables, with his hands firmly

behind him. He wasn't there to dip, to consume--he was there to

reconstruct. He wasn't there for his own profit--not, that is, the

direct; he was there on some chance of feeling the brush of the

wing of the stray spirit of youth. He felt it in fact, he had it

beside him; the old arcade indeed, as his inner sense listened,

gave out the faint sound, as from far off, of the wild waving of

wings. They were folded now over the breasts of buried generations;

but a flutter or two lived again in the turned page of shock-headed

slouch-hatted loiterers whose young intensity of type, in the direction

of pale acuteness, deepened his vision, and even his appreciation,

of racial differences, and whose manipulation of the uncut volume was

too often, however, but a listening at closed doors. He reconstructed

a possible groping Chad of three or four years before, a Chad who had,

after all, simply--for that was the only way to see it--been too vulgar

for his privilege. Surely it WAS a privilege to have been young and

happy just there. Well, the best thing Strether knew of him was that

he had had such a dream.

But his own actual business half an hour later was with a third

floor on the Boulevard Malesherbes--so much as that was definite;

and the fact of the enjoyment by the third-floor windows of a

continuous balcony, to which he was helped by this knowledge, had

perhaps something to do with his lingering for five minutes on the

opposite side of the street. There were points as to which he had

quite made up his mind, and one of these bore precisely on the

wisdom of the abruptness to which events had finally committed him,

a policy that he was pleased to find not at all shaken as he now

looked at his watch and wondered. He HAD announced himself--six

months before; had written out at least that Chad wasn't to be

surprised should he see him some day turn up. Chad had thereupon,

in a few words of rather carefully colourless answer, offered him a

general welcome; and Strether, ruefully reflecting that he might

have understood the warning as a hint to hospitality, a bid for an

invitation, had fallen back upon silence as the corrective most to

his own taste. He had asked Mrs. Newsome moreover not to announce

him again; he had so distinct an opinion on his attacking his job,

should he attack it at all, in his own way. Not the least of this

lady's high merits for him was that he could absolutely rest on her

word. She was the only woman he had known, even at Woollett, as to

whom his conviction was positive that to lie was beyond her art.

Sarah Pocock, for instance, her own daughter, though with social

ideals, as they said, in some respects different--Sarah who WAS, in

her way, aesthetic, had never refused to human commerce that

mitigation of rigour; there were occasions when he had distinctly

seen her apply it. Since, accordingly, at all events, he had had it

from Mrs. Newsome that she had, at whatever cost to her more

strenuous view, conformed, in the matter of preparing Chad, wholly

to his restrictions, he now looked up at the fine continuous

balcony with a safe sense that if the case had been bungled the

mistake was at least his property. Was there perhaps just a

suspicion of that in his present pause on the edge of the Boulevard

and well in the pleasant light?

Many things came over him here, and one of them was that he should

doubtless presently know whether he had been shallow or sharp.

Another was that the balcony in question didn't somehow show as a

convenience easy to surrender. Poor Strether had at this very

moment to recognise the truth that wherever one paused in Paris the

imagination reacted before one could stop it. This perpetual

reaction put a price, if one would, on pauses; but it piled up

consequences till there was scarce room to pick one's steps among

them. What call had he, at such a juncture, for example, to like

Chad's very house? High broad clear--he was expert enough to make

out in a moment that it was admirably built--it fairly embarrassed

our friend by the quality that, as he would have said, it "sprang"

on him. He had struck off the fancy that it might, as a

preliminary, be of service to him to be seen, by a happy accident,

from the third-story windows, which took all the March sun, but of

what service was it to find himself making out after a moment that

the quality "sprung," the quality produced by measure and balance,

the fine relation of part to part and space to space, was probably--

aided by the presence of ornament as positive as it was discreet,

and by the complexion of the stone, a cold fair grey, warmed and

polished a little by life--neither more nor less than a case of

distinction, such a case as he could only feel unexpectedly as a

sort of delivered challenge? Meanwhile, however, the chance he had

allowed for--the chance of being seen in time from the balcony--had

become a fact. Two or three of the windows stood open to the violet

air; and, before Strether had cut the knot by crossing, a young man

had come out and looked about him, had lighted a cigarette and

tossed the match over, and then, resting on the rail, had given

himself up to watching the life below while he smoked. His arrival

contributed, in its order, to keeping Strether in position; the

result of which in turn was that Strether soon felt himself

noticed. The young man began to look at him as in acknowledgement

of his being himself in observation.

This was interesting so far as it went, but the interest was

affected by the young man's not being Chad. Strether wondered at

first if he were perhaps Chad altered, and then saw that this was

asking too much of alteration. The young man was light bright and

alert--with an air too pleasant to have been arrived at by

patching. Strether had conceived Chad as patched, but not beyond

recognition. He was in presence, he felt, of amendments enough as

they stood; it was a sufficient amendment that the gentleman up

there should be Chad's friend. He was young too then, the gentleman

up there--he was very young; young enough apparently to be amused

at an elderly watcher, to be curious even to see what the elderly

watcher would do on finding himself watched. There was youth in

that, there was youth in the surrender to the balcony, there was

youth for Strether at this moment in everything but his own

business; and Chad's thus pronounced association with youth had

given the next instant an extraordinary quick lift to the issue.

The balcony, the distinguished front, testified suddenly, for

Strether's fancy, to something that was up and up; they placed the

whole case materially, and as by an admirable image, on a level

that he found himself at the end of another moment rejoicing to

think he might reach. The young man looked at him still, he looked

at the young man; and the issue, by a rapid process, was that this

knowledge of a perched privacy appeared to him the last of

luxuries. To him too the perched privacy was open, and he saw it

now but in one light--that of the only domicile, the only fireside,

in the great ironic city, on which he had the shadow of a claim.

Miss Gostrey had a fireside; she had told him of it, and it was

something that doubtless awaited him; but Miss Gostrey hadn't yet

arrived--she mightn't arrive for days; and the sole attenuation of

his excluded state was his vision of the small, the admittedly

secondary hotel in the bye-street from the Rue de la Paix, in which

her solicitude for his purse had placed him, which affected him

somehow as all indoor chill, glass-roofed court and slippery

staircase, and which, by the same token, expressed the presence of

Waymarsh even at times when Waymarsh might have been certain to be

round at the bank. It came to pass before he moved that Waymarsh,

and Waymarsh alone, Waymarsh not only undiluted but positively

strengthened, struck him as the present alternative to the young

man in the balcony. When he did move it was fairly to escape that

alternative. Taking his way over the street at last and passing

through the porte-cochere of the house was like consciously leaving

Waymarsh out. However, he would tell him all about it.

Book Third

I

Strether told Waymarsh all about it that very evening, on their

dining together at the hotel; which needn't have happened, he was

all the while aware, hadn't he chosen to sacrifice to this occasion

a rarer opportunity. The mention to his companion of the sacrifice

was moreover exactly what introduced his recital--or, as he would

have called it with more confidence in his interlocutor, his

confession. His confession was that he had been captured and that

one of the features of the affair had just failed to be his

engaging himself on the spot to dinner. As by such a freedom

Waymarsh would have lost him he had obeyed his scruple; and he had

likewise obeyed another scruple--which bore on the question of his

himself bringing a guest.

Waymarsh looked gravely ardent, over the finished soup, at this

array of scruples; Strether hadn't yet got quite used to being so

unprepared for the consequences of the impression he produced. It

was comparatively easy to explain, however, that he hadn't felt

sure his guest would please. The person was a young man whose

acquaintance he had made but that afternoon in the course of rather

a hindered enquiry for another person--an enquiry his new friend

had just prevented in fact from being vain. "Oh," said Strether,

"I've all sorts of things to tell you!"--and he put it in a way

that was a virtual hint to Waymarsh to help him to enjoy the

telling. He waited for his fish, he drank of his wine, he wiped his

long moustache, he leaned back in his chair, he took in the two

English ladies who had just creaked past them and whom he would

even have articulately greeted if they hadn't rather chilled the

impulse; so that all he could do was--by way of doing something--to

say "Merci, Francois!" out quite loud when his fish was brought.

Everything was there that he wanted, everything that could make the

moment an occasion, that would do beautifully--everything but what

Waymarsh might give. The little waxed salle-a-manger was sallow and

sociable; Francois, dancing over it, all smiles, was a man and a

brother; the high-shouldered patronne, with her high-held,

much-rubbed hands, seemed always assenting exuberantly to something

unsaid; the Paris evening in short was, for Strether, in the very

taste of the soup, in the goodness, as he was innocently pleased to

think it, of the wine, in the pleasant coarse texture of the napkin

and the crunch of the thick-crusted bread. These all were things

congruous with his confession, and his confession was that he HAD--

it would come out properly just there if Waymarsh would only take

it properly--agreed to breakfast out, at twelve literally, the next

day. He didn't quite know where; the delicacy of the case came

straight up in the remembrance of his new friend's "We'll see; I'll

take you somewhere!"--for it had required little more than that,

after all, to let him right in. He was affected after a minute,

face to face with his actual comrade, by the impulse to overcolour.

There had already been things in respect to which he knew himself

tempted by this perversity. If Waymarsh thought them bad he should

at least have his reason for his discomfort; so Strether showed

them as worse. Still, he was now, in his way, sincerely perplexed.

Chad had been absent from the Boulevard Malesherbes--was absent

from Paris altogether; he had learned that from the concierge, but

had nevertheless gone up, and gone up--there were no two ways about

it--from an uncontrollable, a really, if one would, depraved

curiosity. The concierge had mentioned to him that a friend of the

tenant of the troisieme was for the time in possession; and this

had been Strether's pretext for a further enquiry, an experiment

carried on, under Chad's roof, without his knowledge. "I found his

friend in fact there keeping the place warm, as he called it, for

him; Chad himself being, as appears, in the south. He went a month

ago to Cannes and though his return begins to be looked for it

can't be for some days. I might, you see, perfectly have waited a

week; might have beaten a retreat as soon as I got this essential

knowledge. But I beat no retreat; I did the opposite; I stayed, I

dawdled, I trifled; above all I looked round. I saw, in fine; and--

I don't know what to call it--I sniffed. It's a detail, but it's as

if there were something--something very good--TO sniff."

Waymarsh's face had shown his friend an attention apparently so

remote that the latter was slightly surprised to find it at this

point abreast with him. "Do you mean a smell? What of?"

"A charming scent. But I don't know."

Waymarsh gave an inferential grunt. "Does he live there with a

woman?"

"I don't know."

Waymarsh waited an instant for more, then resumed. "Has he taken

her off with him?"

"And will he bring her back?"--Strether fell into the enquiry. But

he wound it up as before. "I don't know."

The way he wound it up, accompanied as this was with another drop

back, another degustation of the Leoville, another wipe of his

moustache and another good word for Francois, seemed to produce in

his companion a slight irritation. "Then what the devil DO you

know?"

"Well," said Strether almost gaily, "I guess I don't know anything!"

His gaiety might have been a tribute to the fact that the state he

had been reduced to did for him again what had been done by his talk

of the matter with Miss Gostrey at the London theatre. It was somehow

enlarging; and the air of that amplitude was now doubtless more or

less--and all for Waymarsh to feel--in his further response. "That's

what I found out from the young man."

"But I thought you said you found out nothing."

"Nothing but that--that I don't know anything."

"And what good does that do you?"

"It's just," said Strether, "what I've come to you to help me to

discover. I mean anything about anything over here. I FELT that, up

there. It regularly rose before me in its might. The young man

moreover--Chad's friend--as good as told me so."

"As good as told you you know nothing about anything?" Waymarsh

appeared to look at some one who might have as good as told HIM.

"How old is he?"

"Well, I guess not thirty."

"Yet you had to take that from him?"

"Oh I took a good deal more--since, as I tell you, I took an

invitation to dejeuner."

"And are you GOING to that unholy meal?"

"If you'll come with me. He wants you too, you know. I told him

about you. He gave me his card," Strether pursued, "and his name's

rather funny. It's John Little Bilham, and he says his two surnames

are, on account of his being small, inevitably used together."

"Well," Waymarsh asked with due detachment from these details,

"what's he doing up there?"

"His account of himself is that he's 'only a little artist-man.'

That seemed to me perfectly to describe him. But he's yet in the

phase of study; this, you know, is the great art-school--to pass a

certain number of years in which he came over. And he's a great

friend of Chad's, and occupying Chad's rooms just now because

they're so pleasant. HE'S very pleasant and curious too," Strether

added--"though he's not from Boston."

Waymarsh looked already rather sick of him. "Where is he from?"

Strether thought. "I don't know that, either. But he's

'notoriously,' as he put it himself, not from Boston."

"Well," Waymarsh moralised from dry depths, "every one can't

notoriously be from Boston. Why," he continued, "is he curious?"

"Perhaps just for THAT--for one thing! But really," Strether added,

"for everything. When you meet him you'll see."

"Oh I don't want to meet him," Waymarsh impatiently growled. "Why

don't he go home?"

Strether hesitated. "Well, because he likes it over here."

This appeared in particular more than Waymarsh could bear. "He

ought then to be ashamed of himself, and, as you admit that you

think so too, why drag him in?"

Strether's reply again took time. "Perhaps I do think so myself--

though I don't quite yet admit it. I'm not a bit sure--it's again

one of the things I want to find out. I liked him, and CAN you like

people--? But no matter." He pulled himself up. "There's no doubt I

want you to come down on me and squash me."

Waymarsh helped himself to the next course, which, however proving

not the dish he had just noted as supplied to the English ladies,

had the effect of causing his imagination temporarily to wander.

But it presently broke out at a softer spot. "Have they got a

handsome place up there?"

"Oh a charming place; full of beautiful and valuable things. I

never saw such a place"--and Strether's thought went back to it.

"For a little artist-man--!" He could in fact scarce express it.

But his companion, who appeared now to have a view, insisted.

"Well?"

"Well, life can hold nothing better. Besides, they're things of

which he's in charge."

"So that he does doorkeeper for your precious pair? Can life,"

Waymarsh enquired, "hold nothing better than THAT?" Then as

Strether, silent, seemed even yet to wonder, "Doesn't he know what

SHE is?" he went on.

"I don't know. I didn't ask him. I couldn't. It was impossible. You

wouldn't either. Besides I didn't want to. No more would you."

Strether in short explained it at a stroke. "You can't make out

over here what people do know."

"Then what did you come over for?"

"Well, I suppose exactly to see for myself--without their aid."

"Then what do you want mine for?"

"Oh," Strether laughed, "you're not one of THEM! I do know what you

know."

As, however, this last assertion caused Waymarsh again to look at

him hard--such being the latter's doubt of its implications--he

felt his justification lame. Which was still more the case when

Waymarsh presently said: "Look here, Strether. Quit this."

Our friend smiled with a doubt of his own. "Do you mean my tone?"

"No--damn your tone. I mean your nosing round. Quit the whole job.

Let them stew in their juice. You're being used for a thing you

ain't fit for. People don't take a fine-tooth comb to groom a

horse."

"Am I a fine-tooth comb?" Strether laughed. "It's something I never

called myself!"

"It's what you are, all the same. You ain't so young as you were,

but you've kept your teeth."

He acknowledged his friend's humour. "Take care I don't get them

into YOU! You'd like them, my friends at home, Waymarsh," he

declared; "you'd really particularly like them. And I know"--it was

slightly irrelevant, but he gave it sudden and singular force--"I

know they'd like you!"

"Oh don't work them off on ME!" Waymarsh groaned.

Yet Strether still lingered with his hands in his pockets. "It's

really quite as indispensable as I say that Chad should be got

back."

"Indispensable to whom? To you?"

"Yes," Strether presently said.

"Because if you get him you also get Mrs. Newsome?"

Strether faced it. "Yes."

"And if you don't get him you don't get her?"

It might be merciless, but he continued not to flinch. "I think it

might have some effect on our personal understanding. Chad's of

real importance--or can easily become so if he will--to the

business."

"And the business is of real importance to his mother's husband?"

"Well, I naturally want what my future wife wants. And the thing

will be much better if we have our own man in it."

"If you have your own man in it, in other words," Waymarsh said,

"you'll marry--you personally--more money. She's already rich, as I

understand you, but she'll be richer still if the business can be

made to boom on certain lines that you've laid down."

"I haven't laid them down," Strether promptly returned. "Mr. Newsome

--who knew extraordinarily well what he was about--laid them down

ten years ago."

Oh well, Waymarsh seemed to indicate with a shake of his mane, THAT

didn't matter! "You're fierce for the boom anyway."

His friend weighed a moment in silence the justice of the charge.

"I can scarcely be called fierce, I think, when I so freely take my

chance of the possibility, the danger, of being influenced in a

sense counter to Mrs. Newsome's own feelings."

Waymarsh gave this proposition a long hard look. "I see. You're

afraid yourself of being squared. But you're a humbug," he added,

all the same."

"Oh!" Strether quickly protested.

"Yes, you ask me for protection--which makes you very interesting;

and then you won't take it. You say you want to be squashed--"

"Ah but not so easily! Don't you see," Strether demanded "where my

interest, as already shown you, lies? It lies in my not being

squared. If I'm squared where's my marriage? If I miss my errand I

miss that; and if I miss that I miss everything--I'm nowhere."

Waymarsh--but all relentlessly--took this in. "What do I care where

you are if you're spoiled?"

Their eyes met on it an instant. "Thank you awfully," Strether at

last said. "But don't you think HER judgement of that--?"

"Ought to content me? No."

It kept them again face to face, and the end of this was that

Strether again laughed. "You do her injustice. You really MUST know

her. Good-night."

He breakfasted with Mr. Bilham on the morrow, and, as

inconsequently befell, with Waymarsh massively of the party. The

latter announced, at the eleventh hour and much to his friend's

surprise, that, damn it, he would as soon join him as do anything

else; on which they proceeded together, strolling in a state of

detachment practically luxurious for them to the Boulevard

Malesherbes, a couple engaged that day with the sharp spell of

Paris as confessedly, it might have been seen, as any couple

among the daily thousands so compromised. They walked, wandered,

wondered and, a little, lost themselves; Strether hadn't had for

years so rich a consciousness of time--a bag of gold into which

he constantly dipped for a handful. It was present to him that

when the little business with Mr. Bilham should be over he would

still have shining hours to use absolutely as he liked. There was

no great pulse of haste yet in this process of saving Chad; nor

was that effect a bit more marked as he sat, half an hour later,

with his legs under Chad's mahogany, with Mr. Bilham on one side,

with a friend of Mr. Bilham's on the other, with Waymarsh

stupendously opposite, and with the great hum of Paris coming up

in softness, vagueness-for Strether himself indeed already

positive sweetness--through the sunny windows toward which, the

day before, his curiosity had raised its wings from below. The

feeling strongest with him at that moment had borne fruit almost

faster than he could taste it, and Strether literally felt at the

present hour that there was a precipitation in his fate. He had

known nothing and nobody as he stood in the street; but hadn't

his view now taken a bound in the direction of every one and of

every thing?

"What's he up to, what's he up to?"--something like that was at

the back of his head all the while in respect to little Bilham;

but meanwhile, till he should make out, every one and every thing

were as good as represented for him by the combination of his

host and the lady on his left. The lady on his left, the lady

thus promptly and ingeniously invited to "meet" Mr. Strether and

Mr. Waymarsh--it was the way she herself expressed her case--was

a very marked person, a person who had much to do with our

friend's asking himself if the occasion weren't in its essence

the most baited, the most gilded of traps. Baited it could

properly be called when the repast was of so wise a savour, and

gilded surrounding objects seemed inevitably to need to be when

Miss Barrace--which was the lady's name--looked at them with

convex Parisian eyes and through a glass with a remarkably long

tortoise-shell handle. Why Miss Barrace, mature meagre erect and

eminently gay, highly adorned, perfectly familiar, freely

contradictions and reminding him of some last-century portrait of

a clever head without powder--why Miss Barrace should have been

in particular the note of a "trap" Strether couldn't on the spot

have explained; he blinked in the light of a conviction that he

should know later on, and know well--as it came over him, for

that matter, with force, that he should need to. He wondered what

he was to think exactly of either of his new friends; since the

young man, Chad's intimate and deputy, had, in thus constituting

the scene, practised so much more subtly than he had been

prepared for, and since in especial Miss Barrace, surrounded

clearly by every consideration, hadn't scrupled to figure as a

familiar object. It was interesting to him to feel that he was in

the presence of new measures, other standards, a different scale

of relations, and that evidently here were a happy pair who

didn't think of things at all as he and Waymarsh thought. Nothing

was less to have been calculated in the business than that it

should now be for him as if he and Waymarsh were comparatively

quite at one.

The latter was magnificent--this at least was an assurance

privately given him by Miss Barrace. "Oh your friend's a type,

the grand old American--what shall one call it? The Hebrew

prophet, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, who used when I was a little girl in

the Rue Montaigne to come to see my father and who was usually

the American Minister to the Tuileries or some other court. I

haven't seen one these ever so many years; the sight of it warms

my poor old chilled heart; this specimen is wonderful; in the

right quarter, you know, he'll have a succes fou." Strether

hadn't failed to ask what the right quarter might be, much as he

required his presence of mind to meet such a change in their

scheme. "Oh the artist-quarter and that kind of thing; HERE

already, for instance, as you see." He had been on the point of

echoing "'Here'?--is THIS the artist-quarter?" but she had

already disposed of the question with a wave of all her tortoise-shell

and an easy "Bring him to ME!" He knew on the spot how little he

should be able to bring him, for the very air was by this time,

to his sense, thick and hot with poor Waymarsh's judgement of it.

He was in the trap still more than his companion and, unlike

his companion, not making the best of it; which was precisely what

doubtless gave him his admirable sombre glow. Little did Miss Barrace

know that what was behind it was his grave estimate of her own laxity.

The general assumption with which our two friends had arrived had been

that of finding Mr. Bilham ready to conduct them to one or other of

those resorts of the earnest, the aesthetic fraternity which were shown

among the sights of Paris. In this character it would have justified

them in a proper insistence on discharging their score. Waymarsh's

only proviso at the last had been that nobody should pay for him;

but he found himself, as the occasion developed, paid for on a

scale as to which Strether privately made out that he already

nursed retribution. Strether was conscious across the table of

what worked in him, conscious when they passed back to the small

salon to which, the previous evening, he himself had made so rich

a reference; conscious most of all as they stepped out to the

balcony in which one would have had to be an ogre not to

recognise the perfect place for easy aftertastes. These things

were enhanced for Miss Barrace by a succession of excellent

cigarettes--acknowledged, acclaimed, as a part of the wonderful

supply left behind him by Chad--in an almost equal absorption of

which Strether found himself blindly, almost wildly pushing

forward. He might perish by the sword as well as by famine, and

he knew that his having abetted the lady by an excess that was

rare with him would count for little in the sum--as Waymarsh

might so easily add it up--of her licence. Waymarsh had smoked of

old, smoked hugely; but Waymarsh did nothing now, and that gave

him his advantage over people who took things up lightly just

when others had laid them heavily down. Strether had never

smoked, and he felt as if he flaunted at his friend that this had

been only because of a reason. The reason, it now began to appear

even to himself, was that he had never had a lady to smoke with.

It was this lady's being there at all, however, that was the

strange free thing; perhaps, since she WAS there, her smoking was

the least of her freedoms. If Strether had been sure at each

juncture of what--with Bilham in especial--she talked about, he

might have traced others and winced at them and felt Waymarsh

wince; but he was in fact so often at sea that his sense of the

range of reference was merely general and that he on several

different occasions guessed and interpreted only to doubt. He

wondered what they meant, but there were things he scarce thought

they could be supposed to mean, and "Oh no--not THAT!" was at the

end of most of his ventures. This was the very beginning with him

of a condition as to which, later on, it will be seen, he found

cause to pull himself up; and he was to remember the moment duly

as the first step in a process. The central fact of the place was

neither more nor less, when analysed--and a pressure superficial

sufficed--than the fundamental impropriety of Chad's situation,

round about which they thus seemed cynically clustered.

Accordingly, since they took it for granted, they took for

granted all that was in connexion with it taken for granted at

Woollett--matters as to which, verily, he had been reduced with

Mrs. Newsome to the last intensity of silence. That was the

consequence of their being too bad to be talked about, and was

the accompaniment, by the same token, of a deep conception of

their badness. It befell therefore that when poor Strether put it

to himself that their badness was ultimately, or perhaps even

insolently, what such a scene as the one before him was, so to

speak, built upon, he could scarce shirk the dilemma of reading a

roundabout echo of them into almost anything that came up. This,

he was well aware, was a dreadful necessity; but such was the

stern logic, he could only gather, of a relation to the irregular

life.

It was the way the irregular life sat upon Bilham and Miss

Barrace that was the insidious, the delicate marvel. He was eager

to concede that their relation to it was all indirect, for

anything else in him would have shown the grossness of bad

manners; but the indirectness was none the less consonant--THAT

was striking-with a grateful enjoyment of everything that was

Chad's. They spoke of him repeatedly, invoking his good name and

good nature, and the worst confusion of mind for Strether was

that all their mention of him was of a kind to do him honour.

They commended his munificence and approved his taste, and in

doing so sat down, as it seemed to Strether, in the very soil out

of which these things flowered. Our friend's final predicament

was that he himself was sitting down, for the time, WITH them,

and there was a supreme moment at which, compared with his

collapse, Waymarsh's erectness affected him as really high. One

thing was certain--he saw he must make up his mind. He must

approach Chad, must wait for him, deal with him, master him, but

he mustn't dispossess himself of the faculty of seeing things as

they were. He must bring him to HIM--not go himself, as it were,

so much of the way. He must at any rate be clearer as to what--

should he continue to do that for convenience--he was still

condoning. It was on the detail of this quantity--and what could

the fact be but mystifying?-that Bilham and Miss Barrace threw so

little light. So there they were.

II

When Miss Gostrey arrived, at the end of a week, she made him a

sign; he went immediately to see her, and it wasn't till then

that he could again close his grasp on the idea of a corrective.

This idea however was luckily all before him again from the

moment he crossed the threshold of the little entresol of the

Quartier Marboeuf into which she had gathered, as she said,

picking them up in a thousand flights and funny little passionate

pounces, the makings of a final nest. He recognised in an instant

that there really, there only, he should find the boon with the

vision of which he had first mounted Chad's stairs. He might have

been a little scared at the picture of how much more, in this

place, he should know himself "in" hadn't his friend been on the

spot to measure the amount to his appetite. Her compact and

crowded little chambers, almost dusky, as they at first struck

him, with accumulations, represented a supreme general adjustment

to opportunities and conditions. Wherever he looked he saw an old

ivory or an old brocade, and he scarce knew where to sit for fear

of a misappliance. The life of the occupant struck him of a

sudden as more charged with possession even than Chad's or than

Miss Barrace's; wide as his glimpse had lately become of the

empire of "things," what was before him still enlarged it; the

lust of the eyes and the pride of life had indeed thus their

temple. It was the innermost nook of the shrine--as brown as a

pirate's cave. In the brownness were glints of gold; patches of

purple were in the gloom; objects all that caught, through the

muslin, with their high rarity, the light of the low windows.

Nothing was clear about them but that they were precious, and

they brushed his ignorance with their contempt as a flower, in a

liberty taken with him, might have been whisked under his nose.

But after a full look at his hostess he knew none the less what

most concerned him. The circle in which they stood together was

warm with life, and every question between them would live there

as nowhere else. A question came up as soon as they had spoken,

for his answer, with a laugh, was quickly: "Well, they've got

hold of me!" Much of their talk on this first occasion was his

development of that truth. He was extraordinarily glad to see

her, expressing to her frankly what she most showed him, that one

might live for years without a blessing unsuspected, but that to

know it at last for no more than three days was to need it or

miss it for ever. She was the blessing that had now become his

need, and what could prove it better than that without her he had

lost himself?

"What do you mean?" she asked with an absence of alarm that,

correcting him as if he had mistaken the "period" of one of her

pieces, gave him afresh a sense of her easy movement through the

maze he had but begun to tread. "What in the name of all the

Pococks have you managed to do?"

"Why exactly the wrong thing. I've made a frantic friend of

little Bilham."

"Ah that sort of thing was of the essence of your case and to

have been allowed for from the first." And it was only after this

that, quite as a minor matter, she asked who in the world little

Bilham might be. When she learned that he was a friend of Chad's

and living for the time in Chad's rooms in Chad's absence, quite

as if acting in Chad's spirit and serving Chad's cause, she

showed, however, more interest. "Should you mind my seeing him?

Only once, you know," she added.

"Oh the oftener the better: he's amusing--he's original."

"He doesn't shock you?" Miss Gostrey threw out.

"Never in the world! We escape that with a perfection--! I feel

it to be largely, no doubt, because I don't half-understand him;

but our modus vivendi isn't spoiled even by that. You must dine

with me to meet him," Strether went on. "Then you'll see.'

"Are you giving dinners?"

"Yes--there I am. That's what I mean."

All her kindness wondered. "That you're spending too much money?"

"Dear no--they seem to cost so little. But that I do it to THEM.

I ought to hold off."

She thought again--she laughed. "The money you must be spending

to think it cheap! But I must be out of it--to the naked eye."

He looked for a moment as if she were really failing him. "Then

you won't meet them?" It was almost as if she had developed an

unexpected personal prudence.

She hesitated. "Who are they--first?"

"Why little Bilham to begin with." He kept back for the moment

Miss Barrace. "And Chad--when he comes--you must absolutely see."

"When then does he come?"

"When Bilham has had time to write him, and hear from him about

me. Bilham, however," he pursued, "will report favourably--

favourably for Chad. That will make him not afraid to come. I

want you the more therefore, you see, for my bluff."

"Oh you'll do yourself for your bluff." She was perfectly easy.

"At the rate you've gone I'm quiet."

"Ah but I haven't," said Strether, "made one protest."

She turned it over. "Haven't you been seeing what there's to

protest about?"

He let her, with this, however ruefully, have the whole truth. "I

haven't yet found a single thing."

"Isn't there any one WITH him then?"

"Of the sort I came out about?" Strether took a moment. "How do I

know? And what do I care?"

"Oh oh!"--and her laughter spread. He was struck in fact by the

effect on her of his joke. He saw now how he meant it as a joke.

SHE saw, however, still other things, though in an instant she

had hidden them. "You've got at no facts at all?"

He tried to muster them. "Well, he has a lovely home."

"Ah that, in Paris," she quickly returned, "proves nothing. That

is rather it DISproves nothing. They may very well, you see, the

people your mission is concerned with, have done it FOR him."

"Exactly. And it was on the scene of their doings then that

Waymarsh and I sat guzzling."

"Oh if you forbore to guzzle here on scenes of doings," she

replied, "you might easily die of starvation." With which she

smiled at him. "You've worse before you."

"Ah I've EVERYTHING before me. But on our hypothesis, you know,

they must be wonderful."

"They ARE!" said Miss Gostrey. "You're not therefore, you see,"

she added, "wholly without facts. They've BEEN, in effect,

wonderful."

To have got at something comparatively definite appeared at last a

little to help--a wave by which moreover, the next moment,

recollection was washed. "My young man does admit furthermore that

they're our friend's great interest."

"Is that the expression he uses?"

Strether more exactly recalled. "No--not quite."

"Something more vivid? Less?"

He had bent, with neared glasses, over a group of articles on a

small stand; and at this he came up. "It was a mere allusion, but,

on the lookout as I was, it struck me. 'Awful, you know, as Chad

is'--those were Bilham's words."

"'Awful, you know'--? Oh!"--and Miss Gostrey turned them over. She

seemed, however, satisfied. "Well, what more do you want?"

He glanced once more at a bibelot or two, and everything sent him

back. "But it is all the same as if they wished to let me have it

between the eyes."

She wondered. "Quoi donc?"

"Why what I speak of. The amenity. They can stun you with that as

well as with anything else."

"Oh," she answered, "you'll come round! I must see them each," she

went on, "for myself. I mean Mr. Bilham and Mr. Newsome--Mr.

Bilham naturally first. Once only--once for each; that will do.

But face to face--for half an hour. What's Mr. Chad," she

immediately pursued, "doing at Cannes? Decent men don't go to

Cannes with the--well, with the kind of ladies you mean."

"Don't they?" Strether asked with an interest in decent men that

amused her.

"No, elsewhere, but not to Cannes. Cannes is different. Cannes is

better. Cannes is best. I mean it's all people you know--when you

do know them. And if HE does, why that's different too. He must

have gone alone. She can't be with him."

"I haven't," Strether confessed in his weakness, "the least

idea." There seemed much in what she said, but he was able after a

little to help her to a nearer impression. The meeting with little

Bilham took place, by easy arrangement, in the great gallery of

the Louvre; and when, standing with his fellow visitor before one

of the splendid Titians--the overwhelming portrait of the young

man with the strangely-shaped glove and the blue-grey eyes--he

turned to see the third member of their party advance from the end

of the waxed and gilded vista, he had a sense of having at last

taken hold. He had agreed with Miss Gostrey--it dated even from

Chester--for a morning at the Louvre, and he had embraced

independently the same idea as thrown out by little Bilham, whom

he had already accompanied to the museum of the Luxembourg. The

fusion of these schemes presented no difficulty, and it was to

strike him again that in little Bilham's company contrarieties in

general dropped.

"Oh he's all right--he's one of US!" Miss Gostrey, after the first

exchange, soon found a chance to murmur to her companion; and

Strether, as they proceeded and paused and while a quick unanimity

between the two appeared to have phrased itself in half a dozen

remarks--Strether knew that he knew almost immediately what she

meant, and took it as still another sign that he had got his job

in hand. This was the more grateful to him that he could think of

the intelligence now serving him as an acquisition positively new.

He wouldn't have known even the day before what she meant--that

is if she meant, what he assumed, that they were intense Americans

together. He had just worked round--and with a sharper turn of the

screw than any yet--to the conception of an American intense as

little Bilham was intense. The young man was his first specimen;

the specimen had profoundly perplexed him; at present however

there was light. It was by little Bilham's amazing serenity that

he had at first been affected, but he had inevitably, in his

circumspection, felt it as the trail of the serpent, the

corruption, as he might conveniently have said, of Europe; whereas

the promptness with which it came up for Miss Gostrey but as a

special little form of the oldest thing they knew justified it at

once to his own vision as well. He wanted to be able to like his

specimen with a clear good conscience, and this fully permitted

it. What had muddled him was precisely the small artist-man's way

--it was so complete--of being more American than anybody. But it

now for the time put Strether vastly at his ease to have this view

of a new way.

The amiable youth then looked out, as it had first struck

Strether, at a world in respect to which he hadn't a prejudice.

The one our friend most instantly missed was the usual one in

favour of an occupation accepted. Little Bilham had an occupation,

but it was only an occupation declined; and it was by his general

exemption from alarm, anxiety or remorse on this score that the

impression of his serenity was made. He had come out to Paris to

paint--to fathom, that is, at large, that mystery; but study had

been fatal to him so far as anything COULD be fatal, and his

productive power faltered in proportion as his knowledge grew.

Strether had gathered from him that at the moment of his finding

him in Chad's rooms he hadn't saved from his shipwreck a scrap of

anything but his beautiful intelligence and his confirmed habit of

Paris. He referred to these things with an equal fond familiarity,

and it was sufficiently clear that, as an outfit, they still

served him. They were charming to Strether through the hour spent

at the Louvre, where indeed they figured for him as an unseparated

part of the charged iridescent air, the glamour of the name, the

splendour of the space, the colour of the masters. Yet they were

present too wherever the young man led, and the day after the

visit to the Louvre they hung, in a different walk, about the

steps of our party. He had invited his companions to cross the

river with him, offering to show them his own poor place; and his

own poor place, which was very poor, gave to his idiosyncrasies,

for Strether--the small sublime indifference and independences

that had struck the latter as fresh--an odd and engaging dignity.

He lived at the end of an alley that went out of an old short

cobbled street, a street that went in turn out of a new long

smooth avenue--street and avenue and alley having, however, in

common a sort of social shabbiness; and he introduced them to the

rather cold and blank little studio which he had lent to a comrade

for the term of his elegant absence. The comrade was another

ingenuous compatriot, to whom he had wired that tea was to await

them "regardless," and this reckless repast, and the second

ingenuous compatriot, and the faraway makeshift life, with its

jokes and its gaps, its delicate daubs and its three or four

chairs, its overflow of taste and conviction and its lack of

nearly all else--these things wove round the occasion a spell to

which our hero unreservedly surrendered.

He liked the ingenuous compatriots--for two or three others soon

gathered; he liked the delicate daubs and the free

discriminations--involving references indeed, involving

enthusiasms and execrations that made him, as they said, sit up;

he liked above all the legend of good-humoured poverty, of mutual

accommodation fairly raised to the romantic, that he soon read

into the scene. The ingenuous compatriots showed a candour, he

thought, surpassing even the candour of Woollett; they were

red-haired and long-legged, they were quaint and queer and dear

and droll; they made the place resound with the vernacular, which

he had never known so marked as when figuring for the chosen

language, he must suppose, of contemporary art. They twanged with

a vengeance the aesthetic lyre--they drew from it wonderful airs.

This aspect of their life had an admirable innocence; and he

looked on occasion at Maria Gostrey to see to what extent that

element reached her. She gave him however for the hour, as she had

given him the previous day, no further sign than to show how she

dealt with boys; meeting them with the air of old Parisian

practice that she had for every one, for everything, in turn.

Wonderful about the delicate daubs, masterful about the way to

make tea, trustful about the legs of chairs and familiarly

reminiscent of those, in the other time, the named, the numbered

or the caricatured, who had flourished or failed, disappeared or

arrived, she had accepted with the best grace her second course of

little Bilham, and had said to Strether, the previous afternoon on

his leaving them, that, since her impression was to be renewed,

she would reserve judgement till after the new evidence.

The new evidence was to come, as it proved, in a day or two. He

soon had from Maria a message to the effect that an excellent box at

the Francais had been lent her for the following night; it seeming

on such occasions not the least of her merits that she was subject

to such approaches. The sense of how she was always paying for

something in advance was equalled on Strether's part only by the

sense of how she was always being paid; all of which made for his

consciousness, in the larger air, of a lively bustling traffic,

the exchange of such values as were not for him to handle. She

hated, he knew, at the French play, anything but a box--just as

she hated at the English anything but a stall; and a box was what

he was already in this phase girding himself to press upon her.

But she had for that matter her community with little Bilham: she

too always, on the great issues, showed as having known in time.

It made her constantly beforehand with him and gave him mainly the

chance to ask himself how on the day of their settlement their

account would stand. He endeavoured even now to keep it a little

straight by arranging that if he accepted her invitation she

should dine with him first; but the upshot of this scruple was

that at eight o'clock on the morrow he awaited her with Waymarsh

under the pillared portico. She hadn't dined with him, and it was

characteristic of their relation that she had made him embrace her

refusal without in the least understanding it. She ever caused her

rearrangements to affect him as her tenderest touches. It was on

that principle for instance that, giving him the opportunity to be

amiable again to little Bilham, she had suggested his offering the

young man a seat in their box. Strether had dispatched for this

purpose a small blue missive to the Boulevard Malesherbes, but up

to the moment of their passing into the theatre he had received no

response to his message. He held, however, even after they had

been for some time conveniently seated, that their friend, who

knew his way about, would come in at his own right moment. His

temporary absence moreover seemed, as never yet, to make the right

moment for Miss Gostrey. Strether had been waiting till tonight to

get back from her in some mirrored form her impressions and

conclusions. She had elected, as they said, to see little Bilham

once; but now she had seen him twice and had nevertheless not said

more than a word.

Waymarsh meanwhile sat opposite him with their hostess between;

and Miss Gostrey spoke of herself as an instructor of youth

introducing her little charges to a work that was one of the

glories of literature. The glory was happily unobjectionable, and

the little charges were candid; for herself she had travelled that

road and she merely waited on their innocence. But she referred in

due time to their absent friend, whom it was clear they should

have to give up. "He either won't have got your note," she said,

"or you won't have got his: he has had some kind of hindrance,

and, of course, for that matter, you know, a man never writes

about coming to a box." She spoke as if, with her look, it might

have been Waymarsh who had written to the youth, and the latter's

face showed a mixture of austerity and anguish. She went on

however as if to meet this. "He's far and away, you know, the best

of them."

"The best of whom, ma'am?"

"Why of all the long procession--the boys, the girls, or the old

men and old women as they sometimes really are; the hope, as one

may say, of our country. They've all passed, year after year; but

there has been no one in particular I've ever wanted to stop. I

feel--don't YOU?--that I want to stop little Bilham; he's so

exactly right as he is." She continued to talk to Waymarsh. "He's

too delightful. If he'll only not spoil it! But they always WILL;

they always do; they always have."

"I don't think Waymarsh knows," Strether said after a moment,

"quite what it's open to Bilham to spoil."

"It can't be a good American," Waymarsh lucidly enough replied;

"for it didn't strike me the young man had developed much in THAT

shape."

"Ah," Miss Gostrey sighed, "the name of the good American is as

easily given as taken away! What IS it, to begin with, to BE one,

and what's the extraordinary hurry? Surely nothing that's so

pressing was ever so little defined. It's such an order, really,

that before we cook you the dish we must at least have your

receipt. Besides the poor chicks have time! What I've seen so

often spoiled," she pursued, "is the happy attitude itself, the

state of faith and--what shall I call it?--the sense of beauty.

You're right about him"--she now took in Strether; "little Bilham

has them to a charm, we must keep little Bilham along." Then she

was all again for Waymarsh. "The others have all wanted so

dreadfully to do something, and they've gone and done it in too

many cases indeed. It leaves them never the same afterwards; the

charm's always somehow broken. Now HE, I think, you know, really

won't. He won't do the least dreadful little thing. We shall

continue to enjoy him just as he is. No--he's quite beautiful. He

sees everything. He isn't a bit ashamed. He has every scrap of

the courage of it that one could ask. Only think what he MIGHT do.

One wants really--for fear of some accident--to keep him in view.

At this very moment perhaps what mayn't he be up to? I've had my

disappointments--the poor things are never really safe; or only at

least when you have them under your eye. One can never completely

trust them. One's uneasy, and I think that's why I most miss him

now."

She had wound up with a laugh of enjoyment over her embroidery of

her idea--an enjoyment that her face communicated to Strether, who

almost wished none the less at this moment that she would let poor

Waymarsh alone. HE knew more or less what she meant; but the fact

wasn't a reason for her not pretending to Waymarsh that he

didn't. It was craven of him perhaps, but he would, for the high

amenity of the occasion, have liked Waymarsh not to be so sure of

his wit. Her recognition of it gave him away and, before she had

done with him or with that article, would give him worse. What was

he, all the same, to do? He looked across the box at his friend;

their eyes met; something queer and stiff, something that bore on

the situation but that it was better not to touch, passed in

silence between them. Well, the effect of it for Strether was an

abrupt reaction, a final impatience of his own tendency to

temporise. Where was that taking him anyway? It was one of the

quiet instants that sometimes settle more matters than the

outbreaks dear to the historic muse. The only qualification of the

quietness was the synthetic "Oh hang it!" into which Strether's

share of the silence soundlessly flowered. It represented, this

mute ejaculation, a final impulse to burn his ships. These ships,

to the historic muse, may seem of course mere cockles, but when he

presently spoke to Miss Gostrey it was with the sense at least of

applying the torch. "Is it then a conspiracy?"

"Between the two young men? Well, I don't pretend to be a seer or

a prophetess," she presently replied; "but if I'm simply a woman

of sense he's working for you to-night. I don't quite know how--

but it's in my bones." And she looked at him at last as if, little

material as she yet gave him, he'd really understand. "For an

opinion THAT'S my opinion. He makes you out too well not to."

"Not to work for me to-night?" Strether wondered. "Then I hope he

isn't doing anything very bad."

"They've got you," she portentously answered.

"Do you mean he IS--?"

"They've got you," she merely repeated. Though she disclaimed the

prophetic vision she was at this instant the nearest approach he

had ever met to the priestess of the oracle. The light was in her

eyes. "You must face it now."

He faced it on the spot. "They HAD arranged--?"

"Every move in the game. And they've been arranging ever since. He

has had every day his little telegram from Cannes."

It made Strether open his eyes. "Do you KNOW that?"

"I do better. I see it. This was, before I met him, what I

wondered whether I WAS to see. But as soon as I met him I ceased

to wonder, and our second meeting made me sure. I took him all in.

He was acting--he is still--on his daily instructions."

"So that Chad has done the whole thing?"

"Oh no--not the whole. WE'VE done some of it. You and I and

'Europe.'"

"Europe--yes," Strether mused.

"Dear old Paris," she seemed to explain. But there was more, and,

with one of her turns, she risked it. "And dear old Waymarsh.

You," she declared, "have been a good bit of it."

He sat massive. "A good bit of what, ma'am?"

"Why of the wonderful consciousness of our friend here. You've

helped too in your way to float him to where he is."

"And where the devil IS he?"

She passed it on with a laugh. "Where the devil, Strether, are

you?"

He spoke as if he had just been thinking it out. "Well, quite

already in Chad's hands, it would seem." And he had had with this

another thought. "Will that be--just all through Bilham--the way

he's going to work it? It would be, for him, you know, an idea.

And Chad with an idea--!"

"Well?" she asked while the image held him.

"Well, is Chad--what shall I say?--monstrous?"

"Oh as much as you like! But the idea you speak of," she said,

"won't have been his best. He'll have a better. It won't be all

through little Bilham that he'll work it."

This already sounded almost like a hope destroyed. "Through whom

else then?"

"That's what we shall see!" But quite as she spoke she turned, and

Strether turned; for the door of the box had opened, with the

click of the ouvreuse, from the lobby, and a gentleman, a stranger

to them, had come in with a quick step. The door closed behind

him, and, though their faces showed him his mistake, his air,

which was striking, was all good confidence. The curtain had just

again arisen, and, in the hush of the general attention,

Strether's challenge was tacit, as was also the greeting, with a

quickly deprecating hand and smile, of the unannounced visitor. He

discreetly signed that he would wait, would stand, and these

things and his face, one look from which she had caught, had

suddenly worked for Miss Gostrey. She fitted to them all an answer

for Strether's last question. The solid stranger was simply the

answer--as she now, turning to her friend, indicated. She brought

it straight out for him--it presented the intruder. "Why, through

this gentleman!" The gentleman indeed, at the same time, though

sounding for Strether a very short name, did practically as much

to explain. Strether gasped the name back--then only had he seen

Miss Gostrey had said more than she knew. They were in presence of

Chad himself.

Our friend was to go over it afterwards again and again--he was

going over it much of the time that they were together, and they

were together constantly for three or four days: the note had been

so strongly struck during that first half-hour that everything

happening since was comparatively a minor development. The fact

was that his perception of the young man's identity--so absolutely

checked for a minute--had been quite one of the sensations that

count in life; he certainly had never known one that had acted, as

he might have said, with more of a crowded rush. And the rush

though both vague and multitudinous, had lasted a long time,

protected, as it were, yet at the same time aggravated, by the

circumstance of its coinciding with a stretch of decorous silence.

They couldn't talk without disturbing the spectators in the part

of the balcony just below them; and it, for that matter, came to

Strether--being a thing of the sort that did come to him--that

these were the accidents of a high civilisation; the imposed

tribute to propriety, the frequent exposure to conditions, usually

brilliant, in which relief has to await its time. Relief was never

quite near at hand for kings, queens, comedians and other such

people, and though you might be yourself not exactly one of those,

you could yet, in leading the life of high pressure, guess a

little how they sometimes felt. It was truly the life of high

pressure that Strether had seemed to feel himself lead while he

sat there, close to Chad, during the long tension of the act. He

was in presence of a fact that occupied his whole mind, that

occupied for the half-hour his senses themselves all together; but

he couldn't without inconvenience show anything--which moreover

might count really as luck. What he might have shown, had he shown

at all, was exactly the kind of emotion--the emotion of

bewilderment--that he had proposed to himself from the first,

whatever should occur, to show least. The phenomenon that had

suddenly sat down there with him was a phenomenon of change so

complete that his imagination, which had worked so beforehand,

felt itself, in the connexion, without margin or allowance. It had

faced every contingency but that Chad should not BE Chad, and this

was what it now had to face with a mere strained smile and an

uncomfortable flush.

He asked himself if, by any chance, before he should have in some

way to commit himself, he might feel his mind settled to the new

vision, might habituate it, so to speak, to the remarkable truth.

But oh it was too remarkable, the truth; for what could be more

remarkable than this sharp rupture of an identity? You could deal

with a man as himself--you couldn't deal with him as somebody

else. It was a small source of peace moreover to be reduced to

wondering how little he might know in such an event what a sum he

was setting you. He couldn't absolutely not know, for you couldn't

absolutely not let him. It was a CASE then simply, a strong

case, as people nowadays called such things,' a case of

transformation unsurpassed, and the hope was but in the general

law that strong cases were liable to control from without. Perhaps

he, Strether himself, was the only person after all aware of it.

Even Miss Gostrey, with all her science, wouldn't be, would she?

--and he had never seen any one less aware of anything than

Waymarsh as he glowered at Chad. The social sightlessness of his

old friend's survey marked for him afresh, and almost in an

humiliating way, the inevitable limits of direct aid from this

source. He was not certain, however, of not drawing a shade of

compensation from the privilege, as yet untasted, of knowing more

about something in particular than Miss Gostrey did. His situation

too was a case, for that matter, and he was now so interested,

quite so privately agog, about it, that he had already an eye to

the fun it would be to open up to her afterwards. He derived

during his half-hour no assistance from her, and just this fact of

her not meeting his eyes played a little, it must be confessed,

into his predicament.

He had introduced Chad, in the first minutes, under his breath,

and there was never the primness in her of the person

unacquainted; but she had none the less betrayed at first no

vision but of the stage, where she occasionally found a pretext

for an appreciative moment that she invited Waymarsh to share. The

latter's faculty of participation had never had, all round, such

an assault to meet; the pressure on him being the sharper for this

chosen attitude in her, as Strether judged it, of isolating, for

their natural intercourse, Chad and himself. This intercourse was

meanwhile restricted to a frank friendly look from the young man,

something markedly like a smile, but falling far short of a grin,

and to the vivacity of Strether's private speculation as to

whether HE carried himself like a fool. He didn't quite see how

he could so feel as one without somehow showing as one. The worst

of that question moreover was that he knew it as a symptom the

sense of which annoyed him. "If I'm going to be odiously conscious

of how I may strike the fellow," he reflected, "it was so little

what I came out for that I may as well stop before I begin." This

sage consideration too, distinctly, seemed to leave untouched the

fact that he WAS going to be conscious. He was conscious of

everything but of what would have served him.

He was to know afterwards, in the watches of the night, that

nothing would have been more open to him than after a minute or

two to propose to Chad to seek with him the refuge of the lobby.

He hadn't only not proposed it, but had lacked even the presence

of mind to see it as possible. He had stuck there like a schoolboy

wishing not to miss a minute of the show; though for that portion

of the show then presented he hadn't had an instant's real

attention. He couldn't when the curtain fell have given the

slightest account of what had happened. He had therefore, further,

not at that moment acknowledged the amenity added by this

acceptance of his awkwardness to Chad's general patience. Hadn't

he none the less known at the very time--known it stupidly and

without reaction--that the boy was accepting something? He was

modestly benevolent, the boy--that was at least what he had been

capable of the superiority of making out his chance to be; and one

had one's self literally not had the gumption to get in ahead of

him. If we should go into all that occupied our friend in the

watches of the night we should have to mend our pen; but an

instance or two may mark for us the vividness with which he could

remember. He remembered the two absurdities that, if his presence

of mind HAD failed, were the things that had had most to do with

it. He had never in his life seen a young man come into a box at

ten o'clock at night, and would, if challenged on the question in

advance, have scarce been ready to pronounce as to different ways

of doing so. But it was in spite of this definite to him that Chad

had had a way that was wonderful: a fact carrying with it an

implication that, as one might imagine it, he knew, he had

learned, how.

Here already then were abounding results; he had on the spot and

without the least trouble of intention taught Strether that even

in so small a thing as that there were different ways. He had

done in the same line still more than this; had by a mere shake or

two of the head made his old friend observe that the change in him

was perhaps more than anything else, for the eye, a matter of the

marked streaks of grey, extraordinary at his age, in his thick

black hair; as well as that this new feature was curiously

becoming to him, did something for him, as characterisation, also

even--of all things in the world--as refinement, that had been a

good deal wanted. Strether felt, however, he would have had to

confess, that it wouldn't have been easy just now, on this and

other counts, in the presence of what had been supplied, to be

quite clear as to what had been missed. A reflexion a candid

critic might have made of old, for instance, was that it would

have been happier for the son to look more like the mother; but

this was a reflexion that at present would never occur. The ground

had quite fallen away from it, yet no resemblance whatever to the

mother had supervened. It would have been hard for a young man's

face and air to disconnect themselves more completely than Chad's

at this juncture from any discerned, from any imaginable aspect of

a New England female parent. That of course was no more than had

been on the cards; but it produced in Strether none the less one

of those frequent phenomena of mental reference with which all

judgement in him was actually beset.

Again and again as the days passed he had had a sense of the

pertinence of communicating quickly with Woollett--communicating

with a quickness with which telegraphy alone would rhyme; the

fruit really of a fine fancy in him for keeping things straight,

for the happy forestalment of error. No one could explain better

when needful, nor put more conscience into an account or a report;

which burden of conscience is perhaps exactly the reason why his

heart always sank when the clouds of explanation gathered. His

highest ingenuity was in keeping the sky of life clear of them.

Whether or no he had a grand idea of the lucid, he held that nothing

ever was in fact--for any one else--explained. One went through

the vain motions, but it was mostly a waste of life. A personal

relation was a relation only so long as people either perfectly

understood or, better still, didn't care if they didn't. From

the moment they cared if they didn't it was living by the sweat

of one's brow; and the sweat of one's brow was just what one

might buy one's self off from by keeping the ground free of the

wild weed of delusion. It easily grew too fast, and the Atlantic

cable now alone could race with it. That agency would each day

have testified for him to something that was not what Woollett had

argued. He was not at this moment absolutely sure that the effect

of the morrow's--or rather of the night's--appreciation of the

crisis wouldn't be to determine some brief missive. "Have at last

seen him, but oh dear!"--some temporary relief of that sort seemed

to hover before him. It hovered somehow as preparing them all--yet

preparing them for what? If he might do so more luminously and

cheaply he would tick out in four words: "Awfully old--grey hair."

To this particular item in Chad's appearance he constantly, during

their mute half-hour, reverted; as if so very much more than he

could have said had been involved in it. The most he could have

said would have been: "If he's going to make me feel young--!"

which indeed, however, carried with it quite enough. If Strether

was to feel young, that is, it would be because Chad was to feel

old; and an aged and hoary sinner had been no part of the scheme.

The question of Chadwick's true time of life was, doubtless, what

came up quickest after the adjournment of the two, when the play

was over, to a cafe in the Avenue de l'Opera. Miss Gostrey had in

due course been perfect for such a step; she had known exactly

what they wanted--to go straight somewhere and talk; and Strether

had even felt she had known what he wished to say and that he was

arranging immediately to begin. She hadn't pretended this, as she

HAD pretended on the other hand, to have divined Waymarsh's wish

to extend to her an independent protection homeward; but Strether

nevertheless found how, after he had Chad opposite to him at a

small table in the brilliant halls that his companion straightway

selected, sharply and easily discriminated from others, it was

quite, to his mind, as if she heard him speak; as if, sitting up,

a mile away, in the little apartment he knew, she would listen

hard enough to catch. He found too that he liked that idea, and he

wished that, by the same token, Mrs. Newsome might have caught as

well. For what had above all been determined in him as a necessity

of the first order was not to lose another hour, nor a fraction of

one; was to advance, to overwhelm, with a rush. This was how he

would anticipate--by a night-attack, as might be--any forced

maturity that a crammed consciousness of Paris was likely to take

upon itself to assert on behalf of the boy. He knew to the full,

on what he had just extracted from Miss Gostrey, Chad's marks of

alertness; but they were a reason the more for not dawdling. If he

was himself moreover to be treated as young he wouldn't at all

events be so treated before he should have struck out at least

once. His arms might be pinioned afterwards, but it would have

been left on record that he was fifty. The importance of this he

had indeed begun to feel before they left the theatre; it had

become a wild unrest, urging him to seize his chance. He could

scarcely wait for it as they went; he was on the verge of the

indecency of bringing up the question in the street; he fairly

caught himself going on--so he afterwards invidiously named it--as

if there would be for him no second chance should the present be

lost. Not till, on the purple divan before the perfunctory bock,

he had brought out the words themselves, was he sure, for that

matter, that the present would be saved.

Book Fourth

I

"I've come, you know, to make you break with everything, neither

more nor less, and take you straight home; so you'll be so good as

immediately and favourably to consider it!"--Strether, face to

face with Chad after the play, had sounded these words almost

breathlessly, and with an effect at first positively disconcerting

to himself alone. For Chad's receptive attitude was that of a

person who had been gracefully quiet while the messenger at last

reaching him has run a mile through the dust. During some seconds

after he had spoken Strether felt as if HE had made some such

exertion; he was not even certain that the perspiration wasn't on

his brow. It was the kind of consciousness for which he had to

thank the look that, while the strain lasted, the young man's eyes

gave him. They reflected--and the deuce of the thing was that they

reflected really with a sort of shyness of kindness--his

momentarily disordered state; which fact brought on in its turn

for our friend the dawn of a fear that Chad might simply "take it

out"--take everything out--in being sorry for him. Such a fear,

any fear, was unpleasant. But everything was unpleasant; it was

odd how everything had suddenly turned so. This however was no

reason for letting the least thing go. Strether had the next

minute proceeded as roundly as if with an advantage to follow up.

"Of course I'm a busybody, if you want to fight the case to the

death; but after all mainly in the sense of having known you and

having given you such attention as you kindly permitted when you

were in jackets and knickerbockers. Yes--it was knickerbockers,

I'm busybody enough to remember that; and that you had, for your

age--I speak of the first far-away time--tremendously stout legs.

Well, we want you to break. Your mother's heart's passionately set

upon it, but she has above and beyond that excellent arguments and

reasons. I've not put them into her head--I needn't remind you how

little she's a person who needs that. But they exist--you must

take it from me as a friend both of hers and yours--for myself as

well. I didn't invent them, I didn't originally work them out; but

I understand them, I think I can explain them--by which I mean

make you actively do them justice; and that's why you see me here.

You had better know the worst at once. It's a question of an

immediate rupture and an immediate return. I've been conceited

enough to dream I can sugar that pill. I take at any rate the

greatest interest in the question. I took it already before I left

home, and I don't mind telling you that, altered as you are, I

take it still more now that I've seen you. You're older and--I

don't know what to call it!--more of a handful; but you're by so

much the more, I seem to make out, to our purpose."

"Do I strike you as improved?" Strether was to recall that Chad

had at this point enquired.

He was likewise to recall--and it had to count for some time as

his greatest comfort--that it had been "given" him, as they said

at Woollett, to reply with some presence of mind: "I haven't the

least idea." He was really for a while to like thinking he had

been positively hard. On the point of conceding that Chad had

improved in appearance, but that to the question of appearance the

remark must be confined, he checked even that compromise and left

his reservation bare. Not only his moral, but also, as it were,

his aesthetic sense had a little to pay for this, Chad being

unmistakeably--and wasn't it a matter of the confounded grey hair

again?--handsomer than he had ever promised. That however fell in

perfectly with what Strether had said. They had no desire to keep

down his proper expansion, and he wouldn't be less to their

purpose for not looking, as he had too often done of old, only

bold and wild. There was indeed a signal particular in which he

would distinctly be more so. Strether didn't, as he talked,

absolutely follow himself; he only knew he was clutching his

thread and that he held it from moment to moment a little tighter;

his mere uninterruptedness during the few minutes helped him to do

that. He had frequently for a month, turned over what he should

say on this very occasion, and he seemed at last to have said

nothing he had thought of--everything was so totally different.

But in spite of all he had put the flag at the window. This was

what he had done, and there was a minute during which he affected

himself as having shaken it hard, flapped it with a mighty

flutter, straight in front of his companion's nose. It gave him

really almost the sense of having already acted his part. The

momentary relief--as if from the knowledge that nothing of THAT

at least could be undone--sprang from a particular cause, the

cause that had flashed into operation, in Miss Gostrey's box, with

direct apprehension, with amazed recognition, and that had been

concerned since then in every throb of his consciousness. What it

came to was that with an absolutely new quantity to deal with one

simply couldn't know. The new quantity was represented by the fact

that Chad had been made over. That was all; whatever it was it was

everything. Strether had never seen the thing so done before--it

was perhaps a speciality of Paris. If one had been present at the

process one might little by little have mastered the result; but

he was face to face, as matters stood, with the finished business.

It had freely been noted for him that he might be received as a

dog among skittles, but that was on the basis of the old quantity.

He had originally thought of lines and tones as things to be

taken, but these possibilities had now quite melted away. There

was no computing at all what the young man before him would think

or feel or say on any subject whatever. This intelligence Strether

had afterwards, to account for his nervousness, reconstituted as

he might, just as he had also reconstituted the promptness with

which Chad had corrected his uncertainty. An extraordinarily short

time had been required for the correction, and there had ceased to

be anything negative in his companion's face and air as soon as it

was made. "Your engagement to my mother has become then what they

call here a fait accompli?"--it had consisted, the determinant

touch, in nothing more than that.

Well, that was enough, Strether had felt while his answer hung

fire. He had felt at the same time, however, that nothing could

less become him than that it should hang fire too long. "Yes," he

said brightly, "it was on the happy settlement of the question

that I started. You see therefore to what tune I'm in your family.

Moreover," he added, "I've been supposing you'd suppose it."

"Oh I've been supposing it for a long time, and what you tell me

helps me to understand that you should want to do something. To do

something, I mean," said Chad, "to commemorate an event so--what

do they call it?--so auspicious. I see you make out, and not

unnaturally," he continued, "that bringing me home in triumph as a

sort of wedding-present to Mother would commemorate it better than

anything else. You want to make a bonfire in fact," he laughed,

"and you pitch me on. Thank you, thank you!" he laughed again.

He was altogether easy about it, and this made Strether now see

how at bottom, and in spite of the shade of shyness that really

cost him nothing, he had from the first moment been easy about

everything. The shade of shyness was mere good taste. People with

manners formed could apparently have, as one of their best cards,

the shade of shyness too. He had leaned a little forward to speak;

his elbows were on the table; and the inscrutable new face that he

had got somewhere and somehow was brought by the movement nearer

to his critics There was a fascination for that critic in its not

being, this ripe physiognomy, the face that, under observation at

least, he had originally carried away from Woollett. Strether

found a certain freedom on his own side in defining it as that of

a man of the world--a formula that indeed seemed to come now in

some degree to his relief; that of a man to whom things had

happened and were variously known. In gleams, in glances, the past

did perhaps peep out of it; but such lights were faint and

instantly merged. Chad was brown and thick and strong, and of old

Chad had been rough. Was all the difference therefore that he was

actually smooth? Possibly; for that he WAS smooth was as marked as

in the taste of a sauce or in the rub of a hand. The effect of it

was general--it had retouched his features, drawn them with a

cleaner line. It had cleared his eyes and settled his colour and

polished his fine square teeth--the main ornament of his face; and

at the same time that it had given him a form and a surface,

almost a design, it had toned his voice, established his accent,

encouraged his smile to more play and his other motions to less.

He had formerly, with a great deal of action, expressed very

little; and he now expressed whatever was necessary with almost

none at all. It was as if in short he had really, copious perhaps

but shapeless, been put into a firm mould and turned successfully

out. The phenomenon--Strether kept eyeing it as a phenomenon, an

eminent case--was marked enough to be touched by the finger. He

finally put his hand across the table and laid it on Chad's arm.

"If you'll promise me--here on the spot and giving me your word of

honour--to break straight off, you'll make the future the real

right thing for all of us alike. You'll ease off the strain of

this decent but none the less acute suspense in which I've for so

many days been waiting for you, and let me turn in to rest. I

shall leave you with my blessing and go to bed in peace."

Chad again fell back at this and, his hands pocketed, settled

himself a little; in which posture he looked, though he rather

anxiously smiled, only the more earnest. Then Strether seemed to

see that he was really nervous, and he took that as what he would

have called a wholesome sign. The only mark of it hitherto had

been his more than once taking off and putting on his wide-brimmed

crush hat. He had at this moment made the motion again to remove

it, then had only pushed it back, so that it hung informally on

his strong young grizzled crop. It was a touch that gave the note

of the familiar--the intimate and the belated--to their quiet

colloquy; and it was indeed by some such trivial aid that Strether

became aware at the same moment of something else. The observation

was at any rate determined in him by some light too fine to

distinguish from so many others, but it was none the less sharply

determined. Chad looked unmistakeably during these instants--

well, as Strether put it to himself, all he was worth. Our friend

had a sudden apprehension of what that would on certain sides be.

He saw him in a flash as the young man marked out by women; and

for a concentrated minute the dignity, the comparative austerity,

as he funnily fancied it, of this character affected him almost

with awe. There was an experience on his interlocutor's part that

looked out at him from under the displaced hat, and that looked

out moreover by a force of its own, the deep fact of its quantity

and quality, and not through Chad's intending bravado or swagger.

That was then the way men marked out by women WERE--and also the

men by whom the women were doubtless in turn sufficiently

distinguished. It affected Strether for thirty seconds as a

relevant truth, a truth which, however, the next minute, had

fallen into its relation. "Can't you imagine there being some

questions," Chad asked, "that a fellow--however much impressed by

your charming way of stating things--would like to put to you

first?"

"Oh yes--easily. I'm here to answer everything. I think I can even

tell you things, of the greatest interest to you, that you won't

know enough to ask me. We'll take as many days to it as you like.

But I want," Strether wound up, "to go to bed now."

"Really?"

Chad had spoken in such surprise that he was amused. "Can't you

believe it?--with what you put me through?"

The young man seemed to consider. "Oh I haven't put you through

much--yet."

"Do you mean there's so much more to come?" Strether laughed. "All

the more reason then that I should gird myself." And as if to mark

what he felt he could by this time count on he was already on his

feet.

Chad, still seated, stayed him, with a hand against him, as he

passed between their table and the next. "Oh we shall get on!"

The tone was, as who should say, everything Strether could have

desired; and quite as good the expression of face with which the

speaker had looked up at him and kindly held him. All these things

lacked was their not showing quite so much as the fruit of

experience. Yes, experience was what Chad did play on him, if he

didn't play any grossness of defiance. Of course experience was in

a manner defiance; but it wasn't, at any rate--rather indeed quite

the contrary!--grossness; which was so much gained. He fairly grew

older, Strether thought, while he himself so reasoned. Then with

his mature pat of his visitor's arm he also got up; and there had

been enough of it all by this time to make the visitor feel that

something WAS settled. Wasn't it settled that he had at least the

testimony of Chad's own belief in a settlement? Strether found

himself treating Chad's profession that they would get on as a

sufficient basis for going to bed. He hadn't nevertheless after

this gone to bed directly; for when they had again passed out

together into the mild bright night a check had virtually sprung

from nothing more than a small circumstance which might have acted

only as confirming quiescence. There were people, expressive

sound, projected light, still abroad, and after they had taken in

for a moment, through everything, the great clear architectural

street, they turned off in tacit union to the quarter of

Strether's hotel. "Of course," Chad here abruptly began, "of

course Mother's making things out with you about me has been

natural--and of course also you've had a good deal to go upon.

Still, you must have filled out."

He had stopped, leaving his friend to wonder a little what point

he wished to make; and this it was that enabled Strether meanwhile

to make one. "Oh we've never pretended to go into detail. We

weren't in the least bound to THAT. It was 'filling out' enough to

miss you as we did."

But Chad rather oddly insisted, though under the high lamp at

their corner, where they paused, he had at first looked as if

touched by Strether's allusion to the long sense, at home, of his

absence. "What I mean is you must have imagined."

"Imagined what?"

"Well--horrors."

It affected Strether: horrors were so little--superficially at

least--in this robust and reasoning image. But he was none the

less there to be veracious. "Yes, I dare say we HAVE imagined

horrors. But where's the harm if we haven't been wrong?"

Chad raised his face to the lamp, and it was one of the moments at

which he had, in his extraordinary way, most his air of designedly

showing himself. It was as if at these instants he just presented

himself, his identity so rounded off, his palpable presence and

his massive young manhood, as such a link in the chain as might

practically amount to a kind of demonstration. It was as if--and

how but anomalously?--he couldn't after all help thinking

sufficiently well of these things to let them go for what they

were worth. What could there be in this for Strether but the hint

of some self-respect, some sense of power, oddly perverted;

something latent and beyond access, ominous and perhaps enviable?

The intimation had the next thing, in a flash, taken on a name--a

name on which our friend seized as he asked himself if he weren't

perhaps really dealing with an irreducible young Pagan. This

description--he quite jumped at it--had a sound that gratified his

mental ear, so that of a sudden he had already adopted it. Pagan--

yes, that was, wasn't it? what Chad WOULD logically be. It was

what he must be. It was what he was. The idea was a clue and,

instead of darkening the prospect, projected a certain clearness.

Strether made out in this quick ray that a Pagan was perhaps, at

the pass they had come to, the thing most wanted at Woollett.

They'd be able to do with one--a good one; he'd find an opening--

yes; and Strether's imagination even now prefigured and

accompanied the first appearance there of the rousing personage.

He had only the slight discomfort of feeling, as the young man

turned away from the lamp, that his thought had in the momentary

silence possibly been guessed. "Well, I've no doubt," said Chad,

"you've come near enough. The details, as you say, don't matter.

It HAS been generally the case that I've let myself go. But I'm

coming round--I'm not so bad now." With which they walked on again

to Strether's hotel.

"Do you mean," the latter asked as they approached the door, "that

there isn't any woman with you now?"

"But pray what has that to do with it?"

"Why it's the whole question."

"Of my going home?" Chad was clearly surprised. "Oh not much! Do

you think that when I want to go any one will have any power--"

"To keep you"--Strether took him straight up--"from carrying out

your wish? Well, our idea has been that somebody has hitherto--or

a good many persons perhaps--kept you pretty well from 'wanting.'

That's what--if you're in anybody's hands--may again happen. You

don't answer my question"--he kept it up; "but if you aren't in

anybody's hands so much the better. There's nothing then but what

makes for your going."

Chad turned this over. "I don't answer your question?" He spoke

quite without resenting it. "Well, such questions have always a

rather exaggerated side. One doesn't know quite what you mean by

being in women's 'hands.' It's all so vague. One is when one

isn't. One isn't when one is. And then one can't quite give people

away." He seemed kindly to explain. "I've NEVER got stuck--so

very hard; and, as against anything at any time really better, I

don't think I've ever been afraid." There was something in it that

held Strether to wonder, and this gave him time to go on. He broke

out as with a more helpful thought. "Don't you know how I like

Paris itself?"

The upshot was indeed to make our friend marvel. "Oh if THAT'S all

that's the matter with you--!" It was HE who almost showed

resentment.

Chad's smile of a truth more than met it. "But isn't that enough?"

Strether hesitated, but it came out. "Not enough for your mother!"

Spoken, however, it sounded a trifle odd--the effect of which was

that Chad broke into a laugh. Strether, at this, succumbed as

well, though with extreme brevity. "Permit us to have still our

theory. But if you ARE so free and so strong you're inexcusable.

I'll write in the morning," he added with decision. "I'll say I've

got you."

This appeared to open for Chad a new interest. "How often do you

write?"

"Oh perpetually."

"And at great length?"

Strether had become a little impatient. "I hope it's not found too

great."

"Oh I'm sure not. And you hear as often?"

Again Strether paused. "As often as I deserve."

"Mother writes," said Chad, "a lovely letter."

Strether, before the closed porte-cochere, fixed him a moment.

"It's more, my boy, than YOU do! But our suppositions don't

matter," he added, "if you're actually not entangled."

Chad's pride seemed none the less a little touched. "I never WAS

that--let me insist. I always had my own way." With which he

pursued: "And I have it at present."

"Then what are you here for? What has kept you," Strether asked,

"if you HAVE been able to leave?"

It made Chad, after a stare, throw himself back. "Do you think

one's kept only by women?" His surprise and his verbal emphasis

rang out so clear in the still street that Strether winced till he

remembered the safety of their English speech. "Is that," the

young man demanded, "what they think at Woollett?" At the good

faith in the question Strether had changed colour, feeling that,

as he would have said, he had put his foot in it. He had appeared

stupidly to misrepresent what they thought at Woollett; but before

he had time to rectify Chad again was upon him. "I must say then

you show a low mind!"

It so fell in, unhappily for Strether, with that reflexion of his

own prompted in him by the pleasant air of the Boulevard

Malesherbes, that its disconcerting force was rather unfairly

great. It was a dig that, administered by himself--and

administered even to poor Mrs. Newsome--was no more than salutary;

but administered by Chad--and quite logically--it came nearer

drawing blood. They HADn't a low mind--nor any approach to one;

yet incontestably they had worked, and with a certain smugness, on

a basis that might be turned against them. Chad had at any rate

pulled his visitor up; he had even pulled up his admirable mother;

he had absolutely, by a turn of the wrist and a jerk of the far-flung

noose, pulled up, in a bunch, Woollett browsing in its pride. There

was no doubt Woollett HAD insisted on his coarseness; and what

he at present stood there for in the sleeping street was, by his

manner of striking the other note, to make of such insistence a

preoccupation compromising to the insisters. It was exactly as

if they had imputed to him a vulgarity that he had by a mere

gesture caused to fall from him. The devil of the case was that

Strether felt it, by the same stroke, as falling straight upon

himself. He had been wondering a minute ago if the boy weren't a

Pagan, and he found himself wondering now if he weren't by chance

a gentleman. It didn't in the least, on the spot, spring up

helpfully for him that a person couldn't at the same time be both.

There was nothing at this moment in the air to challenge the

combination; there was everything to give it on the contrary

something of a flourish. It struck Strether into the bargain as

doing something to meet the most difficult of the questions;

though perhaps indeed only by substituting another. Wouldn't it be

precisely by having learned to be a gentleman that he had mastered

the consequent trick of looking so well that one could scarce

speak to him straight? But what in the world was the clue to such

a prime producing cause? There were too many clues then that

Strether still lacked, and these clues to clues were among them.

What it accordingly amounted to for him was that he had to take

full in the face a fresh attribution of ignorance. He had grown

used by this time to reminders, especially from his own lips, of

what he didn't know; but he had borne them because in the first

place they were private and because in the second they practically

conveyed a tribute. He didn't know what was bad, and--as others

didn't know how little he knew it--he could put up with his state.

But if he didn't know, in so important a particular, what was

good, Chad at least was now aware he didn't; and that, for some

reason, affected our friend as curiously public. It was in fact an

exposed condition that the young man left him in long enough for

him to feel its chill--till he saw fit, in a word, generously

again to cover him. This last was in truth what Chad quite

gracefully did. But he did it as with a simple thought that met

the whole of the case. "Oh I'm all right!" It was what Strether

had rather bewilderedly to go to bed on.

II

It really looked true moreover from the way Chad was to behave

after this. He was full of attentions to his mother's ambassador;

in spite of which, all the while, the latter's other relations

rather remarkably contrived to assert themselves. Strether's

sittings pen in hand with Mrs. Newsome up in his own room were

broken, yet they were richer; and they were more than ever

interspersed with the hours in which he reported himself, in a

different fashion, but with scarce less earnestness and fulness,

to Maria Gostrey. Now that, as he would have expressed it, he had

really something to talk about he found himself, in respect to any

oddity that might reside for him in the double connexion, at once

more aware and more indifferent. He had been fine to Mrs. Newsome

about his useful friend, but it had begun to haunt his imagination

that Chad, taking up again for her benefit a pen too long disused,

might possibly be finer. It wouldn't at all do, he saw, that

anything should come up for him at Chad's hand but what

specifically was to have come; the greatest divergence from which

would be precisely the element of any lubrication of their

intercourse by levity It was accordingly to forestall such an

accident that he frankly put before the young man the several

facts, just as they had occurred, of his funny alliance. He spoke

of these facts, pleasantly and obligingly, as "the whole story,"

and felt that he might qualify the alliance as funny if he

remained sufficiently grave about it. He flattered himself that he

even exaggerated the wild freedom of his original encounter with

the wonderful lady; he was scrupulously definite about the absurd

conditions in which they had made acquaintance--their having

picked each other up almost in the street; and he had (finest

inspiration of all!) a conception of carrying the war into the

enemy's country by showing surprise at the enemy's ignorance.

He had always had a notion that this last was the grand style of

fighting; the greater therefore the reason for it, as he couldn't

remember that he had ever before fought in the grand style. Every

one, according to this, knew Miss Gostrey: how came it Chad didn't

know her? The difficulty, the impossibility, was really to escape

it; Strether put on him, by what he took for granted, the burden

of proof of the contrary. This tone was so far successful as that

Chad quite appeared to recognise her as a person whose fame had

reached him, but against his acquaintance with whom much mischance

had worked. He made the point at the same time that his social

relations, such as they could be called, were perhaps not to the

extent Strether supposed with the rising flood of their

compatriots. He hinted at his having more and more given way to a

different principle of selection; the moral of which seemed to be

that he went about little in the "colony." For the moment

certainly he had quite another interest. It was deep, what he

understood, and Strether, for himself, could only so observe it.

He couldn't see as yet how deep. Might he not all too soon! For

there was really too much of their question that Chad had already

committed himself to liking. He liked, to begin with, his

prospective stepfather; which was distinctly what had not been on

the cards. His hating him was the untowardness for which Strether

had been best prepared; he hadn't expected the boy's actual form

to give him more to do than his imputed. It gave him more through

suggesting that he must somehow make up to himself for not being

sure he was sufficiently disagreeable. That had really been

present to him as his only way to be sure he was sufficiently

thorough. The point was that if Chad's tolerance of his

thoroughness were insincere, were but the best of devices for

gaining time, it none the less did treat everything as tacitly

concluded.

That seemed at the end of ten days the upshot of the abundant, the

recurrent talk through which Strether poured into him all it

concerned him to know, put him in full possession of facts and

figures. Never cutting these colloquies short by a minute, Chad

behaved, looked and spoke as if he were rather heavily, perhaps

even a trifle gloomily, but none the less fundamentally and

comfortably free. He made no crude profession of eagerness to

yield, but he asked the most intelligent questions, probed, at

moments, abruptly, even deeper than his friend's layer of

information, justified by these touches the native estimate of his

latent stuff, and had in every way the air of trying to live,

reflectively, into the square bright picture. He walked up and

down in front of this production, sociably took Strether's arm at

the points at which he stopped, surveyed it repeatedly from the

right and from the left, inclined a critical head to either

quarter, and, while he puffed a still more critical cigarette,

animadverted to his companion on this passage and that. Strether

sought relief--there were hours when he required it--in repeating

himself; it was in truth not to be blinked that Chad had a way.

The main question as yet was of what it was a way TO. It made

vulgar questions no more easy; but that was unimportant when all

questions save those of his own asking had dropped. That he was

free was answer enough, and it wasn't quite ridiculous that this

freedom should end by presenting itself as what was difficult to

move. His changed state, his lovely home, his beautiful things,

his easy talk, his very appetite for Strether, insatiable and,

when all was said, flattering--what were such marked matters all

but the notes of his freedom? He had the effect of making a

sacrifice of it just in these handsome forms to his visitor; which

was mainly the reason the visitor was privately, for the time, a

little out of countenance. Strether was at this period again and

again thrown back on a felt need to remodel somehow his plan. He

fairly caught himself shooting rueful glances, shy looks of

pursuit, toward the embodied influence, the definite adversary, who

had by a stroke of her own failed him and on a fond theory of

whose palpable presence he had, under Mrs. Newsome's inspiration,

altogether proceeded. He had once or twice, in secret, literally

expressed the irritated wish that SHE would come out and find her.

He couldn't quite yet force it upon Woollett that such a career,

such a perverted young life, showed after all a certain plausible

side, DID in the case before them flaunt something like an

impunity for the social man; but he could at least treat himself

to the statement that would prepare him for the sharpest echo.

This echo--as distinct over there in the dry thin air as some

shrill "heading" above a column of print--seemed to reach him even

as he wrote. "He says there's no woman," he could hear Mrs.

Newsome report, in capitals almost of newspaper size, to Mrs.

Pocock; and he could focus in Mrs. Pocock the response of the

reader of the journal. He could see in the younger lady's face the

earnestness of her attention and catch the full scepticism of her

but slightly delayed "What is there then?" Just so he could again

as little miss the mother's clear decision: "There's plenty of

disposition, no doubt, to pretend there isn't." Strether had,

after posting his letter, the whole scene out; and it was a scene

during which, coming and going, as befell, he kept his eye not

least upon the daughter. He had his fine sense of the conviction

Mrs. Pocock would take occasion to reaffirm--a conviction bearing,

as he had from the first deeply divined it to bear, on Mr.

Strether's essential inaptitude. She had looked him in his

conscious eyes even before he sailed, and that she didn't believe

HE would find the woman had been written in her book. [sic]

Hadn't she at the best but a scant faith in his ability to find women?

It wasn't even as if he had found her mother--so much more, to her

discrimination, had her mother performed the finding. Her mother

had, in a case her private judgement of which remained educative

of Mrs. Pocock's critical sense, found the man. The man owed his

unchallenged state, in general, to the fact that Mrs. Newsome's

discoveries were accepted at Woollett; but he knew in his bones,

our friend did, how almost irresistibly Mrs. Pocock would now be

moved to show what she thought of his own. Give HER a free hand,

would be the moral, and the woman would soon be found.

His impression of Miss Gostrey after her introduction to Chad was

meanwhile an impression of a person almost unnaturally on her

guard. He struck himself as at first unable to extract from her

what he wished; though indeed OF what he wished at this special

juncture he would doubtless have contrived to make but a crude

statement. It sifted and settled nothing to put to her, tout

betement, as she often said, "Do you like him, eh?"--thanks to his

feeling it actually the least of his needs to heap up the evidence

in the young man's favour. He repeatedly knocked at her door to

let her have it afresh that Chad's case--whatever else of minor

interest it might yield--was first and foremost a miracle almost

monstrous. It was the alteration of the entire man, and was so

signal an instance that nothing else, for the intelligent

observer, could--COULD it?--signify. "It's a plot," he declared--

"there's more in it than meets the eye." He gave the rein to his

fancy. "It's a plant!"

His fancy seemed to please her. "Whose then?"

"Well, the party responsible is, I suppose, the fate that waits

for one, the dark doom that rides. What I mean is that with such

elements one can't count. I've but my poor individual, my modest

human means. It isn't playing the game to turn on the uncanny. All

one's energy goes to facing it, to tracking it. One wants, confound

it, don't you see?" he confessed with a queer face--"one wants to

enjoy anything so rare. Call it then life"--he puzzled it out--

"call it poor dear old life simply that springs the surprise.

Nothing alters the fact that the surprise is paralysing, or at any

rate engrossing--all, practically, hang it, that one sees, that

one CAN see."

Her silences were never barren, nor even dull. "Is that what

you've written home?"

He tossed it off. "Oh dear, yes!"

She had another pause while, across her carpets, he had another

walk. "If you don't look out you'll have them straight over."

"Oh but I've said he'll go back."

"And WILL he?" Miss Gostrey asked.

The special tone of it made him, pulling up, look at her long.

"What's that but just the question I've spent treasures of

patience and ingenuity in giving you, by the sight of him--after

everything had led up--every facility to answer? What is it but

just the thing I came here to-day to get out of you? Will he?"

"No--he won't," she said at last. "He's not free."

The air of it held him. "Then you've all the while known--?"

"I've known nothing but what I've seen; and I wonder," she

declared with some impatience, that you didn't see as much. It was

enough to be with him there--"

"In the box? Yes," he rather blankly urged.

"Well--to feel sure."

"Sure of what?"

She got up from her chair, at this, with a nearer approach than

she had ever yet shown to dismay at his dimness. She even, fairly

pausing for it, spoke with a shade of pity. "Guess!"

It was a shade, fairly, that brought a flush into his face; so

that for a moment, as they waited together, their difference was

between them. "You mean that just your hour with him told you so

much of his story? Very good; I'm not such a fool, on my side, as

that I don't understand you, or as that I didn't in some degree

understand HIM. That he has done what he liked most isn't, among

any of us, a matter the least in dispute. There's equally little

question at this time of day of what it is he does like most. But

I'm not talking," he reasonably explained, "of any mere wretch he

may still pick up. I'm talking of some person who in his present

situation may have held her own, may really have counted."

"That's exactly what I am!" said Miss Gostrey. But she as quickly

made her point. "I thought you thought--or that they think at

Woollett--that that's what mere wretches necessarily do. Mere

wretches necessarily DON'T!" she declared with spirit. "There

must, behind every appearance to the contrary, still be somebody--

somebody who's not a mere wretch, since we accept the miracle.

What else but such a somebody can such a miracle be?"

He took it in. "Because the fact itself IS the woman?"

"A woman. Some woman or other. It's one of the things that HAVE to

be."

"But you mean then at least a good one."

"A good woman?" She threw up her arms with a laugh. "I should call

her excellent!"

"Then why does he deny her?"

Miss Gostrey thought a moment. "Because she's too good to admit!

Don't you see," she went on, "how she accounts for him?"

Strether clearly, more and more, did see; yet it made him also see

other things. "But isn't what we want that he shall account for

HER?"

"Well, he does. What you have before you is his way. You must

forgive him if it isn't quite outspoken. In Paris such debts are

tacit."

Strether could imagine; but still--! "Even when the woman's good?"

Again she laughed out. "Yes, and even when the man is! There's

always a caution in such cases," she more seriously explained--

"for what it may seem to show. There's nothing that's taken as

showing so much here as sudden unnatural goodness."

"Ah then you're speaking now," Strether said, "of people who are

NOT nice."

"I delight," she replied, "in your classifications. But do you

want me," she asked, "to give you in the matter, on this ground,

the wisest advice I'm capable of? Don't consider her, don't judge

her at all in herself. Consider her and judge her only in Chad."

He had the courage at least of his companion's logic. "Because

then I shall like her?" He almost looked, with his quick imagination

as if he already did, though seeing at once also the full extent

of how little it would suit his book. "But is that what I came

out for?"

She had to confess indeed that it wasn't. But there was something

else. "Don't make up your mind. There are all sorts of things. You

haven't seen him all."

This on his side Strether recognised; but his acuteness none the

less showed him the danger. "Yes, but if the more I see the better

he seems?"

Well, she found something. "That may be--but his disavowal of her

isn't, all the same, pure consideration. There's a hitch." She

made it out. "It's the effort to sink her."

Strether winced at the image. "To 'sink'--?"

"Well, I mean there's a struggle, and a part of it is just what he

hides. Take time--that's the only way not to make some mistake

that you'll regret. Then you'll see. He does really want to shake

her off."

Our friend had by this time so got into the vision that he almost

gasped. "After all she has done for him?"

Miss Gostrey gave him a look which broke the next moment into a

wonderful smile. "He's not so good as you think!"

They remained with him, these words, promising him, in their

character of warning, considerable help; but the support he tried

to draw from them found itself on each renewal of contact with

Chad defeated by something else. What could it be, this

disconcerting force, he asked himself, but the sense, constantly

renewed, that Chad WAS--quite in fact insisted on being--as good

as he thought? It seemed somehow as if he couldn't BUT be as good

from the moment he wasn't as bad. There was a succession of days

at all events when contact with him--and in its immediate effect,

as if it could produce no other--elbowed out of Strether's

consciousness everything but itself. Little Bilham once more

pervaded the scene, but little Bilham became even in a higher

degree than he had originally been one of the numerous forms of

the inclusive relation; a consequence promoted, to our friend's

sense, by two or three incidents with which we have yet to make

acquaintance. Waymarsh himself, for the occasion, was drawn into

the eddy; it absolutely, though but temporarily, swallowed him

down, and there were days when Strether seemed to bump against him

as a sinking swimmer might brush a submarine object. The

fathomless medium held them--Chad's manner was the fathomless

medium; and our friend felt as if they passed each other, in their

deep immersion, with the round impersonal eye of silent fish. It

was practically produced between them that Waymarsh was giving him

then his chance; and the shade of discomfort that Strether drew

from the allowance resembled not a little the embarrassment he had

known at school, as a boy, when members of his family had been

present at exhibitions. He could perform before strangers, but

relatives were fatal, and it was now as if, comparatively,

Waymarsh were a relative. He seemed to hear him say "Strike up

then!" and to enjoy a foretaste of conscientious domestic

criticism. He HAD struck up, so far as he actually could; Chad

knew by this time in profusion what he wanted; and what vulgar

violence did his fellow pilgrim expect of him when he had really

emptied his mind? It went somehow to and fro that what poor

Waymarsh meant was "I told you so--that you'd lose your immortal

soul!" but it was also fairly explicit that Strether had his own

challenge and that, since they must go to the bottom of things, he

wasted no more virtue in watching Chad than Chad wasted in

watching him. His dip for duty's sake--where was it worse than

Waymarsh's own? For HE needn't have stopped resisting and

refusing, needn't have parleyed, at that rate, with the foe.

The strolls over Paris to see something or call somewhere were

accordingly inevitable and natural, and the late sessions in the

wondrous troisieme, the lovely home, when men dropped in and the

picture composed more suggestively through the haze of tobacco, of

music more or less good and of talk more or less polyglot, were on

a principle not to be distinguished from that of the mornings and

the afternoons. Nothing, Strether had to recognise as he leaned

back and smoked, could well less resemble a scene of violence than

even the liveliest of these occasions. They were occasions of

discussion, none the less, and Strether had never in his life

heard so many opinions on so many subjects. There were opinions at

Woollett, but only on three or four. The differences were there to

match; if they were doubtless deep, though few, they were quiet--

they were, as might be said, almost as shy as if people had been

ashamed of them. People showed little diffidence about such

things, on the other hand, in the Boulevard Malesherbes, and were

so far from being ashamed of them--or indeed of anything else--

that they often seemed to have invented them to avert those

agreements that destroy the taste of talk. No one had ever done that

at Woollett, though Strether could remember times when he himself had

been tempted to it without quite knowing why. He saw why at present

--he had but wanted to promote intercourse.

These, however, were but parenthetic memories, and the turn taken

by his affair on the whole was positively that if his nerves were

on the stretch it was because he missed violence. When he asked

himself if none would then, in connexion with it, ever come at

all, he might almost have passed as wondering how to provoke it.

It would be too absurd if such a vision as THAT should have to be

invoked for relief; it was already marked enough as absurd that he

should actually have begun with flutters and dignities on the

score of a single accepted meal. What sort of a brute had he

expected Chad to be, anyway?--Strether had occasion to make the

enquiry but was careful to make it in private. He could himself,

comparatively recent as it was--it was truly but the fact of a few

days since--focus his primal crudity; but he would on the

approach of an observer, as if handling an illicit possession,

have slipped the reminiscence out of sight. There were echoes of

it still in Mrs. Newsome's letters, and there were moments when

these echoes made him exclaim on her want of tact. He blushed of

course, at once, still more for the explanation than for the

ground of it: it came to him in time to save his manners that she

couldn't at the best become tactful as quickly as he. Her tact had

to reckon with the Atlantic Ocean, the General Post-Office and the

extravagant curve of the globe. Chad had one day offered tea at

the Boulevard Malesherbes to a chosen few, a group again including

the unobscured Miss Barrace; and Strether had on coming out walked

away with the acquaintance whom in his letters to Mrs. Newsome he

always spoke of as the little artist-man. He had had full occasion

to mention him as the other party, so oddly, to the only close

personal alliance observation had as yet detected in Chad's

existence. Little Bilham's way this afternoon was not Strether's,

but he had none the less kindly come with him, and it was somehow

a part of his kindness that as it had sadly begun to rain they

suddenly found themselves seated for conversation at a cafe in

which they had taken refuge. He had passed no more crowded hour in

Chad's society than the one just ended; he had talked with Miss

Barrace, who had reproached him with not having come to see her,

and he had above all hit on a happy thought for causing Waymarsh's

tension to relax. Something might possibly be extracted for the

latter from the idea of his success with that lady, whose quick

apprehension of what might amuse her had given Strether a free

hand. What had she meant if not to ask whether she couldn't help

him with his splendid encumbrance, and mightn't the sacred rage at

any rate be kept a little in abeyance by thus creating for his

comrade's mind even in a world of irrelevance the possibility of a

relation? What was it but a relation to be regarded as so

decorative and, in especial, on the strength of it, to be whirled

away, amid flounces and feathers, in a coupe lined, by what

Strether could make out, with dark blue brocade? He himself had

never been whirled away--never at least in a coupe and behind a

footman; he had driven with Miss Gostrey in cabs, with Mrs.

Pocock, a few times, in an open buggy, with Mrs. Newsome in a

four-seated cart and, occasionally up at the mountains, on a

buckboard; but his friend's actual adventure transcended his

personal experience. He now showed his companion soon enough

indeed how inadequate, as a general monitor, this last queer

quantity could once more feel itself.

"What game under the sun is he playing?" He signified the next

moment that his allusion was not to the fat gentleman immersed in

dominoes on whom his eyes had begun by resting, but to their host

of the previous hour, as to whom, there on the velvet bench, with

a final collapse of all consistency, he treated himself to the

comfort of indiscretion. "Where do you see him come out?"

Little Bilham, in meditation, looked at him with a kindness almost

paternal. "Don't you like it over here?"

Strether laughed out--for the tone was indeed droll; he let

himself go. "What has that to do with it? The only thing I've any

business to like is to feel that I'm moving him. That's why I ask

you whether you believe I AM? Is the creature"--and he did his

best to show that he simply wished to ascertain--"honest?"

His companion looked responsible, but looked it through a small

dim smile. "What creature do you mean?"

It was on this that they did have for a little a mute interchange.

"Is it untrue that he's free? How then," Strether asked wondering

"does he arrange his life?"

"Is the creature you mean Chad himself?" little Bilham said.

Strether here, with a rising hope, just thought, "We must take one

of them at a time." But his coherence lapsed. "IS there some

woman? Of whom he's really afraid of course I mean--or who does

with him what she likes."

"It's awfully charming of you," Bilham presently remarked, "not to

have asked me that before."

"Oh I'm not fit for my job!"

The exclamation had escaped our friend, but it made little Bilham

more deliberate. "Chad's a rare case!" he luminously observed.

"He's awfully changed," he added.

"Then you see it too?"

"The way he has improved? Oh yes--I think every one must see it.

But I'm not sure," said little Bilham, "that I didn't like him

about as well in his other state."

"Then this IS really a new state altogether?"

"Well," the young man after a moment returned, "I'm not sure he

was really meant by nature to be quite so good. It's like the new

edition of an old book that one has been fond of--revised and

amended, brought up to date, but not quite the thing one knew and

loved. However that may be at all events," he pursued, "I don't

think, you know, that he's really playing, as you call it, any

game. I believe he really wants to go back and take up a career.

He's capable of one, you know, that will improve and enlarge him

still more. He won't then," little Bilham continued to remark, "be

my pleasant well-rubbed old-fashioned volume at all. But of course

I'm beastly immoral. I'm afraid it would be a funny world

altogether--a world with things the way I like them. I ought, I

dare say, to go home and go into business myself. Only I'd simply

rather die--simply. And I've not the least difficulty in making

up my mind not to, and in knowing exactly why, and in defending my

ground against all comers. All the same," he wound up, "I assure

you I don't say a word against it--for himself, I mean--to Chad. I

seem to see it as much the best thing for him. You see he's not

happy."

"DO I?"--Strether stared. "I've been supposing I see just the

opposite--an extraordinary case of the equilibrium arrived at and

assured."

"Oh there's a lot behind it."

"Ah there you are!" Strether exclaimed. "That's just what I want

to get at. You speak of your familiar volume altered out of

recognition. Well, who's the editor?"

Little Bilham looked before him a minute in silence. "He ought to

get married. THAT would do it. And he wants to."

"Wants to marry her?"

Again little Bilham waited, and, with a sense that he had

information, Strether scarce knew what was coming. "He wants to be

free. He isn't used, you see," the young man explained in his

lucid way, "to being so good."

Strether hesitated. "Then I may take it from you that he IS good?"

His companion matched his pause, but making it up with a quiet

fulness. "DO take it from me."

"Well then why isn't he free? He swears to me he is, but meanwhile

does nothing--except of course that he's so kind to me--to prove

it; and couldn't really act much otherwise if he weren't. My

question to you just now was exactly on this queer impression of

his diplomacy: as if instead of really giving ground his line were

to keep me on here and set me a bad example."

As the half-hour meanwhile had ebbed Strether paid his score, and

the waiter was presently in the act of counting out change. Our

friend pushed back to him a fraction of it, with which, after an

emphatic recognition, the personage in question retreated. "You

give too much," little Bilham permitted himself benevolently to

observe.

"Oh I always give too much!" Strether helplessly sighed. "But you

don't," he went on as if to get quickly away from the contemplation

of that doom, "answer my question. Why isn't he free?"

Little Bilham had got up as if the transaction with the waiter had

been a signal, and had already edged out between the table and the

divan. The effect of this was that a minute later they had quitted

the place, the gratified waiter alert again at the open door.

Strether had found himself deferring to his companion's abruptness

as to a hint that he should be answered as soon as they were more

isolated. This happened when after a few steps in the outer air

they had turned the next comer. There our friend had kept it up.

"Why isn't he free if he's good?"

Little Bilham looked him full in the face. "Because it's a

virtuous attachment."

This had settled the question so effectually for the time--that is

for the next few days--that it had given Strether almost a new

lease of life. It must be added however that, thanks to his

constant habit of shaking the bottle in which life handed him the

wine of experience, he presently found the taste of the lees

rising as usual into his draught. His imagination had in other

words already dealt with his young friend's assertion; of which it

had made something that sufficiently came out on the very next

occasion of his seeing Maria Gostrey. This occasion moreover had

been determined promptly by a new circumstance--a circumstance he

was the last man to leave her for a day in ignorance of. "When I

said to him last night," he immediately began, "that without some

definite word from him now that will enable me to speak to them

over there of our sailing--or at least of mine, giving them some

sort of date--my responsibility becomes uncomfortable and my

situation awkward; when I said that to him what do you think was

his reply?" And then as she this time gave it up: "Why that he has

two particular friends, two ladies, mother and daughter, about to

arrive in Paris--coming back from an absence; and that he wants

me so furiously to meet them, know them and like them, that I

shall oblige him by kindly not bringing our business to a crisis

till he has had a chance to see them again himself. Is that,"

Strether enquired, "the way he's going to try to get off? These

are the people," he explained, "that he must have gone down to see

before I arrived. They're the best friends he has in the world,

and they take more interest than any one else in what concerns

him. As I'm his next best he sees a thousand reasons why we should

comfortably meet. He hasn't broached the question sooner because

their return was uncertain--seemed in fact for the present

impossible. But he more than intimates that--if you can believe

it--their desire to make my acquaintance has had to do with their

surmounting difficulties."

"They're dying to see you?" Miss Gostrey asked.

"Dying. Of course," said Strether, "they're the virtuous attachment."

He had already told her about that--had seen her the day after

his talk with little Bilham; and they had then threshed out

together the bearing of the revelation. She had helped him to put

into it the logic in which little Bilham had left it slightly

deficient Strether hadn't pressed him as to the object of the

preference so unexpectedly described; feeling in the presence of

it, with one of his irrepressible scruples, a delicacy from which

he had in the quest of the quite other article worked himself

sufficiently free. He had held off, as on a small principle of

pride, from permitting his young friend to mention a name; wishing

to make with this the great point that Chad's virtuous attachments

were none of his business. He had wanted from the first not to

think too much of his dignity, but that was no reason for not

allowing it any little benefit that might turn up. He had often

enough wondered to what degree his interference might pass for

interested; so that there was no want of luxury in letting it be

seen whenever he could that he didn't interfere. That had of

course at the same time not deprived him of the further luxury of

much private astonishment; which however he had reduced to some

order before communicating his knowledge. When he had done this at

last it was with the remark that, surprised as Miss Gostrey might,

like himself, at first be, she would probably agree with him on

reflexion that such an account of the matter did after all fit the

confirmed appearances. Nothing certainly, on all the indications,

could have been a greater change for him than a virtuous

attachment, and since they had been in search of the "word" as the

French called it, of that change, little Bilham's announcement--

though so long and so oddly delayed--would serve as well as

another. She had assured Strether in fact after a pause that the

more she thought of it the more it did serve; and yet her

assurance hadn't so weighed with him as that before they parted he

hadn't ventured to challenge her sincerity. Didn't she believe the

attachment was virtuous?--he had made sure of her again with the

aid of that question. The tidings he brought her on this second

occasion were moreover such as would help him to make surer still.

She showed at first none the less as only amused. "You say there

are two? An attachment to them both then would, I suppose, almost

necessarily be innocent."

Our friend took the point, but he had his clue. "Mayn't he be

still in the stage of not quite knowing which of them, mother or

daughter, he likes best?"

She gave it more thought. "Oh it must be the daughter--at his

age."

"Possibly. Yet what do we know," Strether asked, "about hers? She

may be old enough."

"Old enough for what?"

"Why to marry Chad. That may be, you know, what they want. And if

Chad wants it too, and little Bilham wants it, and even we, at a

pinch, could do with it--that is if she doesn't prevent repatriation

--why it may be plain sailing yet."

It was always the case for him in these counsels that each of his

remarks, as it came, seemed to drop into a deeper well. He had at

all events to wait a moment to hear the slight splash of this one.

"I don't see why if Mr. Newsome wants to marry the young lady he

hasn't already done it or hasn't been prepared with some statement

to you about it. And if he both wants to marry her and is on good

terms with them why isn't he 'free'?"

Strether, responsively, wondered indeed. "Perhaps the girl herself

doesn't like him."

"Then why does he speak of them to you as he does?"

Strether's mind echoed the question, but also again met it. "Perhaps

it's with the mother he's on good terms."

"As against the daughter?"

"Well, if she's trying to persuade the daughter to consent to him,

what could make him like the mother more? Only," Strether threw

out, "why shouldn't the daughter consent to him?"

"Oh," said Miss Gostrey, "mayn't it be that every one else isn't

quite so struck with him as you?"

"Doesn't regard him you mean as such an 'eligible' young man? Is

that what I've come to?" he audibly and rather gravely sought to

know. "However," he went on, "his marriage is what his mother most

desires--that is if it will help. And oughtn't ANY marriage to

help? They must want him"--he had already worked it out--"to be

better off. Almost any girl he may marry will have a direct

interest in his taking up his chances. It won't suit HER at least

that he shall miss them."

Miss Gostrey cast about. "No--you reason well! But of course on

the other hand there's always dear old Woollett itself."

"Oh yes," he mused--"there's always dear old Woollett itself."

She waited a moment. "The young lady mayn't find herself able to

swallow THAT quantity. She may think it's paying too much; she may

weigh one thing against another."

Strether, ever restless in such debates, took a vague turn "It

will all depend on who she is. That of course--the proved ability

to deal with dear old Woollett, since I'm sure she does deal with

it--is what makes so strongly for Mamie."

"Mamie?"

He stopped short, at her tone, before her; then, though seeing

that it represented not vagueness, but a momentary embarrassed

fulness, let his exclamation come. "You surely haven't forgotten

about Mamie!"

"No, I haven't forgotten about Mamie," she smiled. "There's no

doubt whatever that there's ever so much to be said for her.

Mamie's MY girl!" she roundly declared.

Strether resumed for a minute his walk. "She's really perfectly

lovely, you know. Far prettier than any girl I've seen over here

yet."

"That's precisely on what I perhaps most build." And she mused a

moment in her friend's way. "I should positively like to take her

in hand!"

He humoured the fancy, though indeed finally to deprecate it. "Oh

but don't, in your zeal, go over to her! I need you most and

can't, you know, be left."

But she kept it up. "I wish they'd send her out to me!"

"If they knew you," he returned, "they would "

"Ah but don't they?--after all that, as I've understood you you've

told them about me?"

He had paused before her again, but he continued his course "They

WILL--before, as you say, I've done." Then he came out with the

point he had wished after all most to make. "It seems to give away

now his game. This is what he has been doing--keeping me along

for. He has been waiting for them."

Miss Gostrey drew in her lips. "You see a good deal in it!"

"I doubt if I see as much as you. Do you pretend," he went on,

"that you don't see--?"

"Well, what?"--she pressed him as he paused.

"Why that there must be a lot between them--and that it has been

going on from the first; even from before I came."

She took a minute to answer. "Who are they then--if it's so

grave?"

"It mayn't be grave--it may be gay. But at any rate it's marked.

Only I don't know," Strether had to confess, "anything about them.

Their name for instance was a thing that, after little Bilham's

information, I found it a kind of refreshment not to feel obliged

to follow up."

"Oh," she returned, "if you think you've got off--!"

Her laugh produced in him a momentary gloom. "I don't think I've

got off. I only think I'm breathing for about five minutes. I dare

say I SHALL have, at the best, still to get on." A look, over it

all, passed between them, and the next minute he had come back to

good humour. "I don't meanwhile take the smallest interest in

their name."

"Nor in their nationality?--American, French, English, Polish?"

"I don't care the least little 'hang,'" he smiled, "for their

nationality. It would be nice if they're Polish!" he almost

immediately added.

"Very nice indeed." The transition kept up her spirits. "So you

see you do care."

He did this contention a modified justice. "I think I should if

they WERE Polish. Yes," he thought--"there might be joy in THAT."

"Let us then hope for it." But she came after this nearer to the

question. "If the girl's of the right age of course the mother

can't be. I mean for the virtuous attachment. If the girl's

twenty--and she can't be less--the mother must be at least forty.

So it puts the mother out. SHE'S too old for him."

Strether, arrested again, considered and demurred. "Do you think

so? Do you think any one would be too old for him? I'M eighty, and

I'm too young. But perhaps the girl," he continued, "ISn't twenty.

Perhaps she's only ten--but such a little dear that Chad finds

himself counting her in as an attraction of the acquaintance.

Perhaps she's only five. Perhaps the mother's but five-and-twenty

--a charming young widow."

Miss Gostrey entertained the suggestion. "She IS a widow then?"

"I haven't the least idea!" They once more, in spite of this

vagueness, exchanged a look--a look that was perhaps the longest

yet. It seemed in fact, the next thing, to require to explain

itself; which it did as it could. "I only feel what I've told you

--that he has some reason."

Miss Gostrey's imagination had taken its own flight. "Perhaps

she's NOT a widow."

Strether seemed to accept the possibility with reserve. Still he

accepted it. "Then that's why the attachment--if it's to her--is

virtuous."

But she looked as if she scarce followed. "Why is it virtuous if--

since she's free--there's nothing to impose on it any condition?"

He laughed at her question. "Oh I perhaps don't mean as virtuous

as THAT! Your idea is that it can be virtuous--in any sense worthy

of the name--only if she's NOT free? But what does it become

then," he asked, "for HER?"

"Ah that's another matter." He said nothing for a moment, and she

soon went on. "I dare say you're right, at any rate, about

Mr. Newsome's little plan. He HAS been trying you--has been

reporting on you to these friends."

Strether meanwhile had had time to think more. "Then where's his

straightness?"

"Well, as we say, it's struggling up, breaking out, asserting itself

as it can. We can be on the side, you see, of his straightness.

We can help him. But he has made out," said Miss Gostrey, "that

you'll do."

"Do for what?"

"Why, for THEM--for ces dames. He has watched you, studied you,

liked you--and recognised that THEY must. It's a great compliment

to you, my dear man; for I'm sure they're particular. You came out

for a success. Well," she gaily declared, "you're having it!"

He took it from her with momentary patience and then turned

abruptly away. It was always convenient to him that there were so

many fine things in her room to look at. But the examination of

two or three of them appeared soon to have determined a speech

that had little to do with them. "You don't believe in it!"

"In what?"

"In the character of the attachment. In its innocence."

But she defended herself. "I don't pretend to know anything about

it. Everything's possible. We must see."

"See?" he echoed with a groan. "Haven't we seen enough?"

"I haven't," she smiled.

"But do you suppose then little Bilham has lied?"

"You must find out."

It made him almost turn pale. "Find out any MORE?"

He had dropped on a sofa for dismay; but she seemed, as she stood

over him, to have the last word. "Wasn't what you came out for to

find out ALL?"

Book Fifth

I

The Sunday of the next week was a wonderful day, and Chad Newsome

had let his friend know in advance that he had provided for it.

There had already been a question of his taking him to see the

great Gloriani, who was at home on Sunday afternoons and at whose

house, for the most part, fewer bores were to be met than

elsewhere; but the project, through some accident, had not had

instant effect, and now revived in happier conditions. Chad had

made the point that the celebrated sculptor had a queer old

garden, for which the weather--spring at last frank and fair--was

propitious; and two or three of his other allusions had confirmed

for Strether the expectation of something special. He had by this

time, for all introductions and adventures, let himself recklessly

go, cherishing the sense that whatever the young man showed him he

was showing at least himself. He could have wished indeed, so far

as this went, that Chad were less of a mere cicerone; for he was

not without the impression--now that the vision of his game, his

plan, his deep diplomacy, did recurrently assert itself--of his

taking refuge from the realities of their intercourse in profusely

dispensing, as our friend mentally phrased et panem et circenses.

Our friend continued to feel rather smothered in flowers, though

he made in his other moments the almost angry inference that this

was only because of his odious ascetic suspicion of any form of

beauty. He periodically assured himself--for his reactions were

sharp--that he shouldn't reach the truth of anything till he had

at least got rid of that.

He had known beforehand that Madame de Vionnet and her daughter

would probably be on view, an intimation to that effect having

constituted the only reference again made by Chad to his good

friends from the south. The effect of Strether's talk about them

with Miss Gostrey had been quite to consecrate his reluctance to

pry; something in the very air of Chad's silence--judged in the

light of that talk--offered it to him as a reserve he could

markedly match. It shrouded them about with he scarce knew what, a

consideration, a distinction; he was in presence at any rate--so

far as it placed him there--of ladies; and the one thing that was

definite for him was that they themselves should be, to the extent

of his responsibility, in presence of a gentleman. Was it because

they were very beautiful, very clever, or even very good--was it

for one of these reasons that Chad was, so to speak, nursing his

effect? Did he wish to spring them, in the Woollett phrase, with a

fuller force--to confound his critic, slight though as yet the

criticism, with some form of merit exquisitely incalculable? The

most the critic had at all events asked was whether the persons in

question were French; and that enquiry had been but a proper

comment on the sound of their name. "Yes. That is no!" had been

Chad's reply; but he had immediately added that their English was

the most charming in the world, so that if Strether were wanting

an excuse for not getting on with them he wouldn't in the least

find one. Never in fact had Strether--in the mood into which the

place had quickly launched him--felt, for himself, less the need

of an excuse. Those he might have found would have been, at the

worst, all for the others, the people before him, in whose liberty

to be as they were he was aware that he positively rejoiced. His

fellow guests were multiplying, and these things, their liberty,

their intensity, their variety, their conditions at large, were in

fusion in the admirable medium of the scene.

The place itself was a great impression--a small pavilion, clear-faced

and sequestered, an effect of polished parquet, of fine white panel

and spare sallow gilt, of decoration delicate and rare, in the heart

of the Faubourg Saint-Germain and on the edge of a cluster of gardens

attached to old noble houses. Far back from streets and unsuspected

by crowds, reached by a long passage and a quiet court,

it was as striking to the unprepared mind, he immediately saw,

as a treasure dug up; giving him too, more than anything yet,

the note of the range of the immeasurable town and sweeping away,

as by a last brave brush, his usual landmarks and terms.

It was in the garden, a spacious cherished remnant, out of

which a dozen persons had already passed, that Chad's host

presently met them while the tall bird-haunted trees, all of a twitter

with the spring and the weather, and the high party-walls,

on the other side of which grave hotels stood off for privacy,

spoke of survival, transmission, association, a strong indifferent

persistent order. The day was so soft that the little party had

practically adjourned to the open air but the open air was in such

conditions all a chamber of state. Strether had presently the

sense of a great convent, a convent of missions, famous for he

scarce knew what, a nursery of young priests, of scattered shade,

of straight alleys and chapel-bells, that spread its mass in one

quarter; he had the sense of names in the air, of ghosts at the

windows, of signs and tokens, a whole range of expression, all

about him, too thick for prompt discrimination.

This assault of images became for a moment, in the address of the

distinguished sculptor, almost formidable: Gloriani showed him,

in such perfect confidence, on Chad's introduction of him, a fine

worn handsome face, a face that was like an open letter in a

foreign tongue. With his genius in his eyes, his manners on his

lips, his long career behind him and his honours and rewards all

round, the great artist, in the course of a single sustained look

and a few words of delight at receiving him, affected our friend

as a dazzling prodigy of type. Strether had seen in museums--in

the Luxembourg as well as, more reverently, later on, in the New

York of the billionaires--the work of his hand; knowing too that

after an earlier time in his native Rome he had migrated, in

mid-career, to Paris, where, with a personal lustre almost violent,

he shone in a constellation: all of which was more than enough

to crown him, for his guest, with the light, with the romance,

of glory. Strether, in contact with that element as he had never

yet so intimately been, had the consciousness of opening to it,

for the happy instant, all the windows of his mind, of letting this

rather grey interior drink in for once the sun of a clime not

marked in his old geography. He was to remember again repeatedly

the medal-like Italian face, in which every line was an artist's

own, in which time told only as tone and consecration; and he was

to recall in especial, as the penetrating radiance, as the

communication of the illustrious spirit itself, the manner in

which, while they stood briefly, in welcome and response, face to

face, he was held by the sculptor's eyes. He wasn't soon to forget

them, was to think of them, all unconscious, unintending,

preoccupied though they were, as the source of the deepest

intellectual sounding to which he had ever been exposed. He was in

fact quite to cherish his vision of it, to play with it in idle

hours; only speaking of it to no one and quite aware he couldn't

have spoken without appearing to talk nonsense. Was what it had

told him or what it had asked him the greater of the mysteries?

Was it the most special flare, unequalled, supreme, of the

aesthetic torch, lighting that wondrous world for ever, or was it

above all the long straight shaft sunk by a personal acuteness

that life had seasoned to steel? Nothing on earth could have been

stranger and no one doubtless more surprised than the artist

himself, but it was for all the world to Strether just then as if

in the matter of his accepted duty he had positively been on trial.

The deep human expertness in Gloriani's charming smile--oh the

terrible life behind it!--was flashed upon him as a test of his stuff.

Chad meanwhile, after having easily named his companion, had still

more easily turned away and was already greeting other persons present.

He was as easy, clever Chad, with the great artist as with his obscure

compatriot, and as easy with every one else as with either:

this fell into its place for Strether and made almost a new light,

giving him, as a concatenation, something more he could enjoy.

He liked Gloriani, but should never see him again; of that he was

sufficiently sure. Chad accordingly, who was wonderful with both

of them, was a kind of link for hopeless fancy, an implication of

possibilities--oh if everything had been different! Strether noted

at all events that he was thus on terms with illustrious spirits,

and also that--yes, distinctly--he hadn't in the least swaggered

about it. Our friend hadn't come there only for this figure of Abel

Newsome's son, but that presence threatened to affect the observant

mind as positively central. Gloriani indeed, remembering something

and excusing himself, pursued Chad to speak to him, and Strether was

left musing on many things. One of them was the question of whether,

since he had been tested, he had passed. Did the artist drop him

from having made out that he wouldn't do? He really felt just to-day

that he might do better than usual. Hadn't he done well enough,

so far as that went, in being exactly so dazzled? and in not having

too, as he almost believed, wholly hidden from his host that he felt

the latter's plummet? Suddenly, across the garden, he saw little

Bilham approach, and it was a part of the fit that was on him that

as their eyes met he guessed also HIS knowledge. If he had said to

him on the instant what was uppermost he would have said: "HAVE I

passed?--for of course I know one has to pass here." Little Bilham

would have reassured him, have told him that he exaggerated, and

have adduced happily enough the argument of little Bilham's own

very presence; which, in truth, he could see, was as easy a one as

Gloriani's own or as Chad's. He himself would perhaps then after a

while cease to be frightened, would get the point of view for some

of the faces--types tremendously alien, alien to Woollett--that he

had already begun to take in. Who were they all, the dispersed

groups and couples, the ladies even more unlike those of Woollett

than the gentlemen?--this was the enquiry that, when his young

friend had greeted him, he did find himself making.

"Oh they're every one--all sorts and sizes; of course I mean

within limits, though limits down perhaps rather more than limits

up. There are always artists--he's beautiful and inimitable to the

cher confrere; and then gros bonnets of many kinds--ambassadors,

cabinet ministers, bankers, generals, what do I know? even Jews.

Above all always some awfully nice women--and not too many;

sometimes an actress, an artist, a great performer--but only when

they're not monsters; and in particular the right femmes du monde.

You can fancy his history on that side--I believe it's fabulous:

they NEVER give him up. Yet he keeps them down: no one knows how

he manages; it's too beautiful and bland. Never too many--and a

mighty good thing too; just a perfect choice. But there are not in

any way many bores; it has always been so; he has some secret.

It's extraordinary. And you don't find it out. He's the same to

every one. He doesn't ask questions.'

"Ah doesn't he?" Strether laughed.

Bilham met it with all his candour. "How then should I be here?

"Oh for what you tell me. You're part of the perfect choice."

Well, the young man took in the scene. "It seems rather good to-day."

Strether followed the direction of his eyes. "Are they all, this

time, femmes du monde?"

Little Bilham showed his competence. "Pretty well."

This was a category our friend had a feeling for; a light,

romantic and mysterious, on the feminine element, in which he

enjoyed for a little watching it. "Are there any Poles?"

His companion considered. "I think I make out a 'Portuguee.' But

I've seen Turks."

Strether wondered, desiring justice. "They seem--all the women--

very harmonious."

"Oh in closer quarters they come out!" And then, while Strether

was aware of fearing closer quarters, though giving himself again

to the harmonies, "Well," little Bilham went on, "it IS at the

worst rather good, you know. If you like it, you feel it, this

way, that shows you're not in the least out But you always know

things," he handsomely added, "immediately."

Strether liked it and felt it only too much; so "I say, don't lay

traps for me!" he rather helplessly murmured.

"Well," his companion returned, "he's wonderfully kind to us."

"To us Americans you mean?"

"Oh no--he doesn't know anything about THAT. That's half the

battle here--that you can never hear politics. We don't talk them.

I mean to poor young wretches of all sorts. And yet it's always as

charming as this; it's as if, by something in the air, our squalor

didn't show. It puts us all back--into the last century."

"I'm afraid," Strether said, amused, "that it puts me rather

forward: oh ever so far!"

"Into the next? But isn't that only," little Bilham asked,

"because you're really of the century before?"

"The century before the last? Thank you!" Strether laughed. "If I

ask you about some of the ladies it can't be then that I may hope,

as such a specimen of the rococo, to please them."

"On the contrary they adore--we all adore here--the rococo, and

where is there a better setting for it than the whole thing, the

pavilion and the garden, together? There are lots of people with

collections," little Bilham smiled as he glanced round. "You'll be

secured!"

It made Strether for a moment give himself again to contemplation.

There were faces he scarce knew what to make of. Were they

charming or were they only strange? He mightn't talk politics, yet

he suspected a Pole or two. The upshot was the question at the

back of his head from the moment his friend had joined him. "Have

Madame de Vionnet and her daughter arrived?"

"I haven't seen them yet, but Miss Gostrey has come. She's in the

pavilion looking at objects. One can see SHE'S a collector,"

little Bilham added without offence.

"Oh yes, she's a collector, and I knew she was to come. Is Madame

de Vionnet a collector?" Strether went on.

"Rather, I believe; almost celebrated." The young man met, on it,

a little, his friend's eyes. "I happen to know--from Chad, whom I

saw last night--that they've come back; but only yesterday.

He wasn't sure--up to the last. This, accordingly," little Bilham

went on, "will be--if they ARE here--their first appearance after

their return."

Strether, very quickly, turned these things over. "Chad told you

last night? To me, on our way here, he said nothing about it."

"But did you ask him?"

Strether did him the justice. "I dare say not."

"Well," said little Bilham, "you're not a person to whom it's easy

to tell things you don't want to know. Though it is easy, I admit--

it's quite beautiful," he benevolently added, "when you do want to."

Strether looked at him with an indulgence that matched his

intelligence. "Is that the deep reasoning on which--about these

ladies--you've been yourself so silent?"

Little Bilham considered the depth of his reasoning. "I haven't

been silent. I spoke of them to you the other day, the day we sat

together after Chad's tea-party."

Strether came round to it. "They then are the virtuous attachment?"

"I can only tell you that it's what they pass for. But isn't that

enough? What more than a vain appearance does the wisest of us

know? I commend you," the young man declared with a pleasant

emphasis, "the vain appearance."

Strether looked more widely round, and what he saw, from face to face,

deepened the effect of his young friend's words. "Is it so good?"

"Magnificent."

Strether had a pause. "The husband's dead?"

"Dear no. Alive."

"Oh!" said Strether. After which, as his companion laughed:

"How then can it be so good?"

"You'll see for yourself. One does see."

"Chad's in love with the daughter?"

"That's what I mean."

Strether wondered. "Then where's the difficulty?"

"Why, aren't you and I--with our grander bolder ideas?"

"Oh mine--!" Strether said rather strangely. But then as if to

attenuate: "You mean they won't hear of Woollett?"

Little Bilham smiled. "Isn't that just what you must see about?"

It had brought them, as she caught the last words, into relation

with Miss Barrace, whom Strether had already observed--as he had

never before seen a lady at a party--moving about alone. Coming

within sound of them she had already spoken, and she took again,

through her long-handled glass, all her amused and amusing

possession. "How much, poor Mr. Strether, you seem to have to see

about! But you can't say," she gaily declared, "that I don't do

what I can to help you. Mr. Waymarsh is placed. I've left him in

the house with Miss Gostrey."

"The way," little Bilham exclaimed, "Mr. Strether gets the ladies

to work for him! He's just preparing to draw in another; to

pounce--don't you see him?--on Madame de Vionnet."

"Madame de Vionnet? Oh, oh, oh!" Miss Barrace cried in a wonderful

crescendo. There was more in it, our friend made out, than met the

ear. Was it after all a joke that he should be serious about

anything? He envied Miss Barrace at any rate her power of not

being. She seemed, with little cries and protests and quick

recognitions, movements like the darts of some fine high-feathered

free-pecking bird, to stand before life as before some full

shop-window. You could fairly hear, as she selected and pointed,

the tap of her tortoise-shell against the glass. "It's certain that

we do need seeing about; only I'm glad it's not I who have to do it.

One does, no doubt, begin that way; then suddenly one finds that

one has given it up. It's too much, it's too difficult. You're

wonderful, you people," she continued to Strether, "for not feeling

those things--by which I mean impossibilities. You never feel them.

You face them with a fortitude that makes it a lesson to watch you."

"Ah but"--little Bilham put it with discouragement--"what do we

achieve after all? We see about you and report--when we even go so

far as reporting. But nothing's done."

"Oh you, Mr. Bilham," she replied as with an impatient rap on the

glass, "you're not worth sixpence! You come over to convert the

savages--for I know you verily did, I remember you--and the

savages simply convert YOU."

"Not even!" the young man woefully confessed: "they haven't gone

through that form. They've simply--the cannibals!--eaten me;

converted me if you like, but converted me into food. I'm but the

bleached bones of a Christian."

"Well then there we are! Only"--and Miss Barrace appealed again to

Strether--"don't let it discourage you. You'll break down soon

enough, but you'll meanwhile have had your moments. Il faut en

avoir. I always like to see you while you last. And I'll tell you

who WILL last."

"Waymarsh?"--he had already taken her up.

She laughed out as at the alarm of it. "He'll resist even Miss

Gostrey: so grand is it not to understand. He's wonderful."

"He is indeed," Strether conceded. "He wouldn't tell me of this

affair--only said he had an engagement; but with such a gloom, you

must let me insist, as if it had been an engagement to be hanged.

Then silently and secretly he turns up here with you. Do you call

THAT 'lasting'?"

"Oh I hope it's lasting!" Miss Barrace said. "But he only, at the

best, bears with me. He doesn't understand--not one little scrap.

He's delightful. He's wonderful," she repeated.

"Michelangelesque!"--little Bilham completed her meaning. "He IS

a success. Moses, on the ceiling, brought down to the floor;

overwhelming, colossal, but somehow portable."

"Certainly, if you mean by portable," she returned, "looking so

well in one's carriage. He's too funny beside me in his comer; he

looks like somebody, somebody foreign and famous, en exil; so that

people wonder--it's very amusing--whom I'm taking about. I show

him Paris, show him everything, and he never turns a hair. He's

like the Indian chief one reads about, who, when he comes up to

Washington to see the Great Father, stands wrapt in his blanket

and gives no sign. I might be the Great Father--from the way he

takes everything." She was delighted at this hit of her identity

with that personage--it fitted so her character; she declared it

was the title she meant henceforth to adopt. "And the way he sits,

too, in the corner of my room, only looking at my visitors very

hard and as if he wanted to start something! They wonder what he

does want to start. But he's wonderful," Miss Barrace once more

insisted. "He has never started anything yet."

It presented him none the less, in truth, to her actual friends,

who looked at each other in intelligence, with frank amusement on

Bilham's part and a shade of sadness on Strether's. Strether's

sadness sprang--for the image had its grandeur--from his thinking

how little he himself was wrapt in his blanket, how little, in

marble halls, all too oblivious of the Great Father, he resembled

a really majestic aboriginal. But he had also another reflexion.

"You've all of you here so much visual sense that you've somehow

all 'run' to it. There are moments when it strikes one that you

haven't any other."

"Any moral," little Bilham explained, watching serenely, across

the garden, the several femmes du monde. "But Miss Barrace has a

moral distinction," he kindly continued; speaking as if for Strether's

benefit not less than for her own.

"HAVE you?" Strether, scarce knowing what he was about, asked of

her almost eagerly.

"Oh not a distinction"--she was mightily amused at his tone--"Mr. Bilham's

too good. But I think I may say a sufficiency. Yes, a sufficiency.

Have you supposed strange things of me?"--and she fixed him again,

through all her tortoise-shell, with the droll interest of it.

"You ARE all indeed wonderful. I should awfully disappoint you.

I do take my stand on my sufficiency. But I know, I confess,"

she went on, "strange people. I don't know how it happens;

I don't do it on purpose; it seems to be my doom--as if I were

always one of their habits: it's wonderful! I dare say moreover,"

she pursued with an interested gravity, "that I do, that we all

do here, run too much to mere eye. But how can it be helped?

We're all looking at each other--and in the light of Paris one

sees what things resemble. That's what the light of Paris seems

always to show. It's the fault of the light of Paris--dear old light!"

"Dear old Paris!" little Bilham echoed.

"Everything, every one shows," Miss Barrace went on.

"But for what they really are?" Strether asked.

"Oh I like your Boston 'reallys'! But sometimes--yes."

"Dear old Paris then!" Strether resignedly sighed while for a

moment they looked at each other. Then he broke out: "Does

Madame de Vionnet do that? I mean really show for what she is?"

Her answer was prompt. "She's charming. She's perfect."

"Then why did you a minute ago say 'Oh, oh, oh!' at her name?"

She easily remembered. "Why just because--! She's wonderful."

"Ah she too?"--Strether had almost a groan.

But Miss Barrace had meanwhile perceived relief. "Why not put your

question straight to the person who can answer it best?"

"No," said little Bilham; "don't put any question; wait, rather--

it will be much more fun--to judge for yourself. He has come to

take you to her."

II

On which Strether saw that Chad was again at hand, and he

afterwards scarce knew, absurd as it may seem, what had then

quickly occurred. The moment concerned him, he felt, more deeply

than he could have explained, and he had a subsequent passage of

speculation as to whether, on walking off with Chad, he hadn't

looked either pale or red. The only thing he was clear about was

that, luckily, nothing indiscreet had in fact been said and that

Chad himself was more than ever, in Miss Barrace's great sense,

wonderful. It was one of the connexions--though really why it

should be, after all, was none so apparent--in which the whole

change in him came out as most striking. Strether recalled as they

approached the house that he had impressed him that first night as

knowing how to enter a box. Well, he impressed him scarce less now

as knowing how to make a presentation. It did something for

Strether's own quality--marked it as estimated; so that our poor

friend, conscious and passive, really seemed to feel himself quite

handed over and delivered; absolutely, as he would have said, made

a present of, given away. As they reached the house a young woman,

about to come forth, appeared, unaccompanied, on the steps; at the

exchange with whom of a word on Chad's part Strether immediately

perceived that, obligingly, kindly, she was there to meet them.

Chad had left her in the house, but she had afterwards come

halfway and then the next moment had joined them in the garden.

Her air of youth, for Strether, was at first almost disconcerting,

while his second impression was, not less sharply, a degree of

relief at there not having just been, with the others, any freedom

used about her. It was upon him at a touch that she was no subject

for that, and meanwhile, on Chad's introducing him, she had spoken

to him, very simply and gently, in an English clearly of the

easiest to her, yet unlike any other he had ever heard. It wasn't

as if she tried; nothing, he could see after they had been a few

minutes together, was as if she tried; but her speech, charming

correct and odd, was like a precaution against her passing for a

Pole. There were precautions, he seemed indeed to see, only when

there were really dangers.

Later on he was to feel many more of them, but by that time he was

to feel other things besides. She was dressed in black, but in

black that struck him as light and transparent; she was

exceedingly fair, and, though she was as markedly slim, her face

had a roundness, with eyes far apart and a little strange.

Her smile was natural and dim; her hat not extravagant; he had only

perhaps a sense of the clink, beneath her fine black sleeves, of

more gold bracelets and bangles than he had ever seen a lady wear.

Chad was excellently free and light about their encounter; it was

one of the occasions on which Strether most wished he himself

might have arrived at such ease and such humour: "Here you are

then, face to face at last; you're made for each other--vous allez

voir; and I bless your union." It was indeed, after he had gone

off, as if he had been partly serious too. This latter motion had

been determined by an enquiry from him about "Jeanne"; to which

her mother had replied that she was probably still in the house

with Miss Gostrey, to whom she had lately committed her. "Ah but

you know," the young man had rejoined, "he must see her"; with

which, while Strether pricked up his ears, he had started as if to

bring her, leaving the other objects of his interest together.

Strether wondered to find Miss Gostrey already involved, feeling

that he missed a link; but feeling also, with small delay, how

much he should like to talk with her of Madame de Vionnet on this

basis of evidence.

The evidence as yet in truth was meagre; which, for that matter,

was perhaps a little why his expectation had had a drop. There was

somehow not quite a wealth in her; and a wealth was all that, in

his simplicity, he had definitely prefigured. Still, it was too

much to be sure already that there was but a poverty. They moved

away from the house, and, with eyes on a bench at some distance,

he proposed that they should sit down. "I've heard a great deal

about you," she said as they went; but he had an answer to it that

made her stop short. "Well, about YOU, Madame de Vionnet, I've

heard, I'm bound to say, almost nothing"--those struck him as the

only words he himself could utter with any lucidity; conscious as

he was, and as with more reason, of the determination to be in

respect to the rest of his business perfectly plain and go

perfectly straight. It hadn't at any rate been in the least his

idea to spy on Chad's proper freedom. It was possibly, however, at

this very instant and under the impression of Madame de Vionnet's

pause, that going straight began to announce itself as a matter

for care. She had only after all to smile at him ever so gently in

order to make him ask himself if he weren't already going crooked.

It might be going crooked to find it of a sudden just only clear

that she intended very definitely to be what he would have called

nice to him. This was what passed between them while, for another

instant, they stood still; he couldn't at least remember

afterwards what else it might have been. The thing indeed really

unmistakeable was its rolling over him as a wave that he had been,

in conditions incalculable and unimaginable, a subject of

discussion. He had been, on some ground that concerned her,

answered for; which gave her an advantage he should never be able

to match.

"Hasn't Miss Gostrey," she asked, "said a good word for me?"

What had struck him first was the way he was bracketed with that

lady; and he wondered what account Chad would have given of their

acquaintance. Something not as yet traceable, at all events. had

obviously happened. "I didn't even know of her knowing you."

"Well, now she'll tell you all. I'm so glad you're in relation

with her."

This was one of the things--the "all" Miss Gostrey would now tell

him--that, with every deference to present preoccupation, was

uppermost for Strether after they had taken their seat. One of the

others was, at the end of five minutes, that she--oh incontestably,

yes--DIFFERED less; differed, that is, scarcely at all--well,

superficially speaking, from Mrs. Newsome or even from Mrs. Pocock.

She was ever so much younger than the one and not so young as the other;

but what WAS there in her, if anything, that would have made it

impossible he should meet her at Woollett? And wherein was her talk

during their moments on the bench together not the same as would have been

found adequate for a Woollett garden-party?--unless perhaps truly in

not being quite so bright. She observed to him that Mr. Newsome had, to

her knowledge, taken extraordinary pleasure in his visit; but there was

no good lady at Woollett who wouldn't have been at least up to that.

Was there in Chad, by chance, after all, deep down, a principle of

aboriginal loyalty that had made him, for sentimental ends, attach

himself to elements, happily encountered, that would remind him most

of the old air and the old soil? Why accordingly be in a flutter--

Strether could even put it that way--about this unfamiliar

phenomenon of the femme du monde? On these terms Mrs. Newsome

herself was as much of one. Little Bilham verily had testified

that they came out, the ladies of the type, in close quarters; but

it was just in these quarters--now comparatively close--that he

felt Madame de Vionnet's common humanity. She did come out, and

certainly to his relief, but she came out as the usual thing.

There might be motives behind, but so could there often be even at

Woollett. The only thing was that if she showed him she wished to

like him--as the motives behind might conceivably prompt--it

would possibly have been more thrilling for him that she should

have shown as more vividly alien. Ah she was neither Turk nor

Pole!--which would be indeed flat once more for Mrs. Newsome and

Mrs. Pocock. A lady and two gentlemen had meanwhile, however,

approached their bench, and this accident stayed for the time

further developments.

They presently addressed his companion, the brilliant strangers;

she rose to speak to them, and Strether noted how the escorted

lady, though mature and by no means beautiful, had more of the

bold high look, the range of expensive reference, that he had, as

might have been said, made his plans for. Madame de Vionnet

greeted her as "Duchesse" and was greeted in turn, while talk

started in French, as "Ma toute-belle"; little facts that had

their due, their vivid interest for Strether. Madame de Vionnet

didn't, none the less, introduce him--a note he was conscious of

as false to the Woollett scale and the Woollett humanity; though

it didn't prevent the Duchess, who struck him as confident and

free, very much what he had obscurely supposed duchesses, from

looking at him as straight and as hard--for it WAS hard--as if she

would have liked, all the same, to know him. "Oh yes, my dear,

it's all right, it's ME; and who are YOU, with your interesting

wrinkles and your most effective (is it the handsomest, is it the

ugliest?) of noses?"--some such loose handful of bright flowers

she seemed, fragrantly enough, to fling at him. Strether almost

wondered--at such a pace was he going--if some divination of the

influence of either party were what determined Madame de Vionnet's

abstention. One of the gentlemen, in any case, succeeded in

placing himself in close relation with our friend's companion; a

gentleman rather stout and importantly short, in a hat with a

wonderful wide curl to its brim and a frock coat buttoned with an

effect of superlative decision. His French had quickly turned to

equal English, and it occurred to Strether that he might well be

one of the ambassadors. His design was evidently to assert a claim

to Madame de Vionnet's undivided countenance, and he made it good

in the course of a minute--led her away with a trick of three

words; a trick played with a social art of which Strether, looking

after them as the four, whose backs were now all turned, moved

off, felt himself no master.

He sank again upon his bench and, while his eyes followed the

party, reflected, as he had done before, on Chad's strange

communities. He sat there alone for five minutes, with plenty to

think of; above all with his sense of having suddenly been dropped

by a charming woman overlaid now by other impressions and in fact

quite cleared and indifferent. He hadn't yet had so quiet a

surrender; he didn't in the least care if nobody spoke to him

more. He might have been, by his attitude, in for something of a

march so broad that the want of ceremony with which he had just

been used could fall into its place as but a minor incident of the

procession. Besides, there would be incidents enough, as he felt

when this term of contemplation was closed by the reappearance of

little Bilham, who stood before him a moment with a suggestive

"Well?" in which he saw himself reflected as disorganised, as

possibly floored. He replied with a "Well!" intended to show that

he wasn't floored in the least. No indeed; he gave it out, as the

young man sat down beside him, that if, at the worst, he had been

overturned at all, he had been overturned into the upper air, the

sublimer element with which he had an affinity and in which he

might be trusted a while to float. It wasn't a descent to earth to

say after an instant and in sustained response to the reference:

"You're quite sure her husband's living?"

"Oh dear, yes."

"Ah then--!"

"Ah then what?"

Strether had after all to think. "Well, I'm sorry for them." But

it didn't for the moment matter more than that. He assured his

young friend he was quite content. They wouldn't stir; were all

right as they were. He didn't want to be introduced; had been

introduced already about as far as he could go. He had seen

moreover an immensity; liked Gloriani, who, as Miss Barrace kept

saying, was wonderful; had made out, he was sure, the half-dozen

other 'men who were distinguished, the artists, the critics and oh

the great dramatist--HIM it was easy to spot; but wanted--no,

thanks, really--to talk with none of them; having nothing at all

to say and finding it would do beautifully as it was; do

beautifully because what it was--well, was just simply too late.

And when after this little Bilham, submissive and responsive, but

with an eye to the consolation nearest, easily threw off some

"Better late than never!" all he got in return for it was a sharp

"Better early than late!" This note indeed the next thing

overflowed for Strether into a quiet stream of demonstration that

as soon as he had let himself go he felt as the real relief. It

had consciously gathered to a head, but the reservoir had filled

sooner than he knew, and his companion's touch was to make the

waters spread. There were some things that had to come in time if

they were to come at all. If they didn't come in time they were

lost for ever. It was the general sense of them that had

overwhelmed him with its long slow rush.

"It's not too late for YOU, on any side, and you don't strike me

as in danger of missing the train; besides which people can be in

general pretty well trusted, of course--with the clock of their

freedom ticking as loud as it seems to do here--to keep an eye on

the fleeting hour. All the same don't forget that you're young--

blessedly young; be glad of it on the contrary and live up to it.

Live all you can; it's a mistake not to. It doesn't so much matter

what you do in particular, so long as you have your life. If you

haven't had that what HAVE you had? This place and these

impressions--mild as you may find them to wind a man up so; all my

impressions of Chad and of people I've seen at HIS place--well,

have had their abundant message for me, have just dropped THAT

into my mind. I see it now. I haven't done so enough before--

and now I'm old; too old at any rate for what I see. Oh I DO see,

at least; and more than you'd believe or I can express. It's too late.

And it's as if the train had fairly waited at the station for me

without my having had the gumption to know it was there.

Now I hear its faint receding whistle miles and miles down the line.

What one loses one loses; make no mistake about that. The affair--

I mean the affair of life--couldn't, no doubt, have been different

for me; for it's at the best a tin mould, either fluted and embossed,

with ornamental excrescences, or else smooth and dreadfully plain,

into which, a helpless jelly, one's consciousness is poured--

so that one 'takes' the form as the great cook says, and is more

or less compactly held by it: one lives in fine as one can.

Still, one has the illusion of freedom; therefore don't be, like me,

without the memory of that illusion. I was either, at the right time,

too stupid or too intelligent to have it; I don't quite know which.

Of course at present I'm a case of reaction against the mistake;

and the voice of reaction should, no doubt, always be taken with

an allowance. But that doesn't affect the point that the right time

is now yours. The right time is ANY time that one is still so lucky

as to have. You've plenty; that's the great thing; you're, as I say,

damn you, so happily and hatefully young. Don't at any rate miss things

out of stupidity. Of course I don't take you for a fool, or I

shouldn't be addressing you thus awfully. Do what you like so long

as you don't make MY mistake. For it was a mistake. Live!" . . .

Slowly and sociably, with full pauses and straight dashes,

Strether had so delivered himself; holding little Bilham

from step to step deeply and gravely attentive. The end of all was

that the young man had turned quite solemn, and that this was a

contradiction of the innocent gaiety the speaker had wished to

promote. He watched for a moment the consequence of his words,

and then, laying a hand on his listener's knee and as if to end

with the proper joke: "And now for the eye I shall keep on you!"

"Oh but I don't know that I want to be, at your age, too different

from you!"

"Ah prepare while you're about it," said Strether, "to be more

amusing."

Little Bilham continued to think, but at last had a smile. "Well,

you ARE amusing--to ME."

"Impayable, as you say, no doubt. But what am I to myself?"

Strether had risen with this, giving his attention now to an

encounter that, in the middle of the garden, was in the act of

taking place between their host and the lady at whose side Madame

de Vionnet had quitted him. This lady, who appeared within a few

minutes to have left her friends, awaited Gloriani's eager

approach with words on her lips that Strether couldn't catch, but

of which her interesting witty face seemed to give him the echo.

He was sure she was prompt and fine, but also that she had met her

match, and he liked--in the light of what he was quite sure was

the Duchess's latent insolence--the good humour with which the

great artist asserted equal resources. Were they, this pair, of

the "great world"?--and was he himself, for the moment and thus

related to them by his observation, IN it? Then there was

something in the great world covertly tigerish, which came to him

across the lawn and in the charming air as a waft from the jungle.

Yet it made him admire most of the two, made him envy, the glossy

male tiger, magnificently marked. These absurdities of the stirred

sense, fruits of suggestion ripening on the instant, were all

reflected in his next words to little Bilham. "I know--if we talk

of that--whom I should enjoy being like!"

Little Bilham followed his eyes; but then as with a shade of knowing

surprise: "Gloriani?"

Our friend had in fact already hesitated, though not on the hint

of his companion's doubt, in which there were depths of critical

reserve. He had just made out, in the now full picture, something

and somebody else; another impression had been superimposed. A

young girl in a white dress and a softly plumed white hat had

suddenly come into view, and what was presently clear was that her

course was toward them. What was clearer still was that the

handsome young man at her side was Chad Newsome, and what was

clearest of all was that she was therefore Mademoiselle de Vionnet,

that she was unmistakeably pretty--bright gentle shy happy

wonderful--and that Chad now, with a consummate calculation

of effect, was about to present her to his old friend's vision.

What was clearest of all indeed was something much more than this,

something at the single stroke of which--and wasn't it simply

juxtaposition?--all vagueness vanished. It was the click of a

spring--he saw the truth. He had by this time also met Chad's

look; there was more of it in that; and the truth, accordingly, so

far as Bilham's enquiry was concerned, had thrust in the answer.

"Oh Chad!"--it was that rare youth he should have enjoyed being

"like." The virtuous attachment would be all there before him; the

virtuous attachment would be in the very act of appeal for his blessing;

Jeanne de Vionnet, this charming creature, would be exquisitely,

intensely now--the object of it. Chad brought her straight up to him,

and Chad was, oh yes, at this moment--for the glory of Woollett or

whatever--better still even than Gloriani. He had plucked this

blossom; he had kept it over-night in water; and at last as he held

it up to wonder he did enjoy his effect. That was why Strether had

felt at first the breath of calculation--and why moreover, as he

now knew, his look at the girl would be, for the young man, a sign

of the latter's success. What young man had ever paraded about that

way, without a reason, a maiden in her flower? And there was

nothing in his reason at present obscure. Her type sufficiently

told of it--they wouldn't, they couldn't, want her to go to

Woollett. Poor Woollett, and what it might miss!--though brave Chad

indeed too, and what it might gain! Brave Chad however had just

excellently spoken. "This is a good little friend of mine who knows

all about you and has moreover a message for you. And this, my

dear"--he had turned to the child herself--"is the best man in the

world, who has it in his power to do a great deal for us and whom I

want you to like and revere as nearly as possible as much as I do."

She stood there quite pink, a little frightened, prettier and

prettier and not a bit like her mother. There was in this last

particular no resemblance but that of youth to youth; and here was

in fact suddenly Strether's sharpest impression. It went wondering,

dazed, embarrassed, back to the woman he had just been talking

with; it was a revelation in the light of which he already saw she

would become more interesting. So slim and fresh and fair, she had

yet put forth this perfection; so that for really believing it of

her, for seeing her to any such developed degree as a mother,

comparison would be urgent. Well, what was it now but fairly thrust

upon him? "Mamma wishes me to tell you before we go," the girl

said, "that she hopes very much you'll come to see us very soon.

She has something important to say to you."

"She quite reproaches herself," Chad helpfully explained: "you were

interesting her so much when she accidentally suffered you to be

interrupted."

"Ah don't mention it!" Strether murmured, looking kindly from one

to the other and wondering at many things.

"And I'm to ask you for myself," Jeanne continued with her hands

clasped together as if in some small learnt prayer--"I'm to ask you

for myself if you won't positively come."

"Leave it to me, dear--I'll take care of it!" Chad genially

declared in answer to this, while Strether himself almost held his

breath. What was in the girl was indeed too soft, too unknown for

direct dealing; so that one could only gaze at it as at a picture,

quite staying one's own hand. But with Chad he was now on ground--

Chad he could meet; so pleasant a confidence in that and in

everything did the young man freely exhale. There was the whole of

a story in his tone to his companion, and he spoke indeed as if

already of the family. It made Strether guess the more quickly what

it might be about which Madame de Vionnet was so urgent. Having

seen him then she had found him easy; she wished to have it out

with him that some way for the young people must be discovered,

some way that would not impose as a condition the transplantation

of her daughter. He already saw himself discussing with this lady

the attractions of Woollett as a residence for Chad's companion.

Was that youth going now to trust her with the affair--so that it

would be after all with one of his "lady-friends" that his mother's

missionary should be condemned to deal? It was quite as if for an

instant the two men looked at each other on this question. But

there was no mistaking at last Chad's pride in the display of such

a connexion. This was what had made him so carry himself while,

three minutes before, he was bringing it into view; what had caused

his friend, first catching sight of him, to be so struck with his

air. It was, in a word, just when he thus finally felt Chad putting

things straight off on him that he envied him, as he had mentioned

to little Bilham, most. The whole exhibition however was but a

matter of three or four minutes, and the author of it had soon

explained that, as Madame de Vionnet was immediately going "on,"

this could be for Jeanne but a snatch. They would all meet again

soon, and Strether was meanwhile to stay and amuse himself--"I'll

pick you up again in plenty of time." He took the girl off as he

had brought her, and Strether, with the faint sweet foreignness of

her "Au revoir, monsieur!" in his ears as a note almost

unprecedented, watched them recede side by side and felt how, once

more, her companion's relation to her got an accent from it. They

disappeared among the others and apparently into the house;

whereupon our friend turned round to give out to little Bilham the

conviction of which he was full. But there was no little Bilham any

more; little Bilham had within the few moments, for reasons of his

own, proceeded further: a circumstance by which, in its order,

Strether was also sensibly affected.

III

Chad was not in fact on this occasion to keep his promise of coming

back; but Miss Gostrey had soon presented herself with an

explanation of his failure. There had been reasons at the last for

his going off with ces dames; and he had asked her with much

instance to come out and take charge of their friend. She did so,

Strether felt as she took her place beside him, in a manner that

left nothing to desire. He had dropped back on his bench, alone

again for a time, and the more conscious for little Bilham's

defection of his unexpressed thought; in respect to which however

this next converser was a still more capacious vessel. "It's the

child!" he had exclaimed to her almost as soon as she appeared; and

though her direct response was for some time delayed he could feel

in her meanwhile the working of this truth. It might have been

simply, as she waited, that they were now in presence altogether of

truth spreading like a flood and not for the moment to be offered

her in the mere cupful; inasmuch as who should ces dames prove to

be but persons about whom--once thus face to face with them--she

found she might from the first have told him almost everything?

This would have freely come had he taken the simple precaution of

giving her their name. There could be no better example--and she

appeared to note it with high amusement--than the way, making

things out already so much for himself, he was at last throwing

precautions to the winds. They were neither more nor less, she and

the child's mother, than old school-friends--friends who had

scarcely met for years but whom this unlooked-for chance had

brought together with a rush. It was a relief, Miss Gostrey hinted,

to feel herself no longer groping; she was unaccustomed to grope

and as a general thing, he might well have seen, made straight

enough for her clue. With the one she had now picked up in her

hands there need be at least no waste of wonder. "She's coming to

see me--that's for YOU," Strether's counsellor continued; "but I

don't require it to know where I am."

The waste of wonder might be proscribed; but Strether,

characteristically, was even by this time in the immensity of

space. "By which you mean that you know where SHE is?"

She just hesitated. "I mean that if she comes to see me I shall--

now that I've pulled myself round a bit after the shock--not be at

home."

Strether hung poised. "You call it--your recognition--a shock?"

She gave one of her rare flickers of impatience. "It was a

surprise, an emotion. Don't be so literal. I wash my hands of her."

Poor Strether's face lengthened. "She's impossible--?"

"She's even more charming than I remembered her."

"Then what's the matter?"

She had to think how to put it. "Well, I'M impossible. It's

impossible. Everything's impossible."

He looked at her an instant. "I see where you're coming out.

Everything's possible." Their eyes had on it in fact an exchange of

some duration; after which he pursued: "Isn't it that beautiful

child?" Then as she still said nothing: "Why don't you mean to

receive her?"

Her answer in an instant rang clear. "Because I wish to keep out of

the business."

It provoked in him a weak wail. "You're going to abandon me NOW?"

"No, I'm only going to abandon HER. She'll want me to help her with

you. And I won't."

"You'll only help me with her? Well then--!" Most of the persons

previously gathered had, in the interest of tea, passed into the

house, and they had the gardens mainly to themselves. The shadows

were long, the last call of the birds, who had made a home of their

own in the noble interspaced quarter, sounded from the high trees

in the other gardens as well, those of the old convent and of the

old hotels; it was as if our friends had waited for the full charm

to come out. Strether's impressions were still present; it was as

if something had happened that "nailed" them, made them more

intense; but he was to ask himself soon afterwards, that evening,

what really HAD happened--conscious as he could after all remain

that for a gentleman taken, and taken the first time, into the

"great world," the world of ambassadors and duchesses, the items

made a meagre total. It was nothing new to him, however, as we

know, that a man might have--at all events such a man as he--an

amount of experience out of any proportion to his adventures; so

that, though it was doubtless no great adventure to sit on there

with Miss Gostrey and hear about Madame de Vionnet, the hour, the

picture, the immediate, the recent, the possible--as well as the

communication itself, not a note of which failed to reverberate--

only gave the moments more of the taste of history.

It was history, to begin with, that Jeanne's mother had been

three-and-twenty years before, at Geneva, schoolmate and good

girlfriend to Maria Gostrey, who had moreover enjoyed since then,

though interruptedly and above all with a long recent drop,

other glimpses of her. Twenty-three years put them both on,

no doubt; and Madame de Vionnet--though she had married straight

after school--couldn't be today an hour less than thirty-eight.

This made her ten years older than Chad--though ten years, also, if

Strether liked, older than she looked; the least, at any rate, that

a prospective mother-in-law could be expected to do with. She would

be of all mothers-in-law the most charming; unless indeed, through

some perversity as yet insupposeable, she should utterly belie herself

in that relation. There was none surely in which, as Maria remembered

her, she mustn't be charming; and this frankly in spite of the stigma

of failure in the tie where failure always most showed. It was no test

there--when indeed WAS it a test there?--for Monsieur de Vionnet

had been a brute. She had lived for years apart from him--which was

of course always a horrid position; but Miss Gostrey's impression

of the matter had been that she could scarce have made a better

thing of it had she done it on purpose to show she was amiable. She

was so amiable that nobody had had a word to say; which was luckily

not the case for her husband. He was so impossible that she had the

advantage of all her merits.

It was still history for Strether that the Comte de Vionnet--it

being also history that the lady in question was a Countess--should

now, under Miss Gostrey's sharp touch, rise before him as a high

distinguished polished impertinent reprobate, the product of a

mysterious order; it was history, further, that the charming girl

so freely sketched by his companion should have been married out of

hand by a mother, another figure of striking outline, full of dark

personal motive; it was perhaps history most of all that this

company was, as a matter of course, governed by such considerations

as put divorce out of the question. "Ces gens-la don't divorce, you

know, any more than they emigrate or abjure--they think it impious

and vulgar"; a fact in the light of which they seemed but the more

richly special. It was all special; it was all, for Strether's

imagination, more or less rich. The girl at the Genevese school, an

isolated interesting attaching creature, then both sensitive and

violent, audacious but always forgiven, was the daughter of a

French father and an English mother who, early left a widow, had

married again--tried afresh with a foreigner; in her career with

whom she had apparently given her child no example of comfort. All

these people--the people of the English mother's side--had been of

condition more or less eminent; yet with oddities and disparities

that had often since made Maria, thinking them over, wonder what

they really quite rhymed to. It was in any case her belief that the

mother, interested and prone to adventure, had been without

conscience, had only thought of ridding herself most quickly of a

possible, an actual encumbrance. The father, by her impression, a

Frenchman with a name one knew, had been a different matter,

leaving his child, she clearly recalled, a memory all fondness, as

well as an assured little fortune which was unluckily to make her

more or less of a prey later on. She had been in particular, at

school, dazzlingly, though quite booklessly, clever; as polyglot

as a little Jewess (which she wasn't, oh no!) and chattering French,

English, German, Italian, anything one would, in a way that made a

clean sweep, if not of prizes and parchments, at least of every

"part," whether memorised or improvised, in the curtained costumed

school repertory, and in especial of all mysteries of race and

vagueness of reference, all swagger about "home," among their

variegated mates.

It would doubtless be difficult to-day, as between French and

English, to name her and place her; she would certainly show, on

knowledge, Miss Gostrey felt, as one of those convenient types who

don't keep you explaining--minds with doors as numerous as the

many-tongued cluster of confessionals at Saint Peter's. You might

confess to her with confidence in Roumelian, and even Roumelian

sins. Therefore--! But Strether's narrator covered her implication

with a laugh; a laugh by which his betrayal of a sense of the lurid

in the picture was also perhaps sufficiently protected. He had a

moment of wondering, while his friend went on, what sins might be

especially Roumelian. She went on at all events to the mention of

her having met the young thing--again by some Swiss lake--in her

first married state, which had appeared for the few intermediate

years not at least violently disturbed. She had been lovely at that

moment, delightful to HER, full of responsive emotion, of amused

recognitions and amusing reminders, and then once more, much later,

after a long interval, equally but differently charming--touching

and rather mystifying for the five minutes of an encounter at a

railway-station en province, during which it had come out that her

life was all changed. Miss Gostrey had understood enough to see,

essentially, what had happened, and yet had beautifully dreamed

that she was herself faultless. There were doubtless depths in her,

but she was all right; Strether would see if she wasn't. She was

another person however--that had been promptly marked--from the

small child of nature at the Geneva school, a little person quite

made over (as foreign women WERE, compared with American) by

marriage. Her situation too had evidently cleared itself up; there

would have been--all that was possible--a judicial separation. She

had settled in Paris, brought up her daughter, steered her boat. It

was no very pleasant boat--especially there--to be in; but Marie de

Vionnet would have headed straight. She would have friends,

certainly--and very good ones. There she was at all events--and it

was very interesting. Her knowing Mr. Chad didn't in the least

prove she hadn't friends; what it proved was what good ones HE had.

"I saw that," said Miss Gostrey, "that night at the Francais; it

came out for me in three minutes. I saw HER--or somebody like her.

And so," she immediately added, "did you."

"Oh no--not anybody like her!" Strether laughed. "But you mean," he

as promptly went on, "that she has had such an influence on him?"

Miss Gostrey was on her feet; it was time for them to go. "She has

brought him up for her daughter."

Their eyes, as so often, in candid conference, through their

settled glasses, met over it long; after which Strether's again

took in the whole place. They were quite alone there now. "Mustn't

she rather--in the time then--have rushed it?"

"Ah she won't of course have lost an hour. But that's just the good

mother--the good French one. You must remember that of her--that as

a mother she's French, and that for them there's a special

providence. It precisely however--that she mayn't have been able to

begin as far back as she'd have liked--makes her grateful for aid."

Strether took this in as they slowly moved to the house on their

way out. "She counts on me then to put the thing through?"

"Yes--she counts on you. Oh and first of all of course," Miss

Gostrey added, "on her--well, convincing you."

"Ah," her friend returned, "she caught Chad young!"

"Yes, but there are women who are for all your 'times of life.'

They're the most wonderful sort."

She had laughed the words out, but they brought her companion, the

next thing, to a stand. "Is what you mean that she'll try to make a

fool of me?"

"Well, I'm wondering what she WILL--with an opportunity--make."

"What do you call," Strether asked, "an opportunity? My going to

see her?"

"Ah you must go to see her"--Miss Gostrey was a trifle evasive.

"You can't not do that. You'd have gone to see the other woman. I

mean if there had been one--a different sort. It's what you came

out for."

It might be; but Strether distinguished. "I didn't come out to see

THIS sort."

She had a wonderful look at him now. "Are you disappointed she

isn't worse?"

He for a moment entertained the question, then found for it the

frankest of answers. "Yes. If she were worse she'd be better for

our purpose. It would be simpler."

"Perhaps," she admitted. "But won't this be pleasanter?"

"Ah you know," he promptly replied, "I didn't come out--wasn't that

just what you originally reproached me with?--for the pleasant."

"Precisely. Therefore I say again what I said at first. You must

take things as they come. Besides," Miss Gostrey added, "I'm not

afraid for myself."

"For yourself--?"

"Of your seeing her. I trust her. There's nothing she'll say about

me. In fact there's nothing she CAN."

Strether wondered--little as he had thought of this. Then he broke

out. "Oh you women!"

There was something in it at which she flushed. "Yes--there we are.

We're abysses." At last she smiled. "But I risk her!"

He gave himself a shake. "Well then so do I!" But he added as they

passed into the house that he would see Chad the first thing in the

morning.

This was the next day the more easily effected that the young man,

as it happened, even before he was down, turned up at his hotel.

Strether took his coffee, by habit, in the public room; but on his

descending for this purpose Chad instantly proposed an adjournment

to what he called greater privacy. He had himself as yet had

nothing--they would sit down somewhere together; and when after a

few steps and a turn into the Boulevard they had, for their greater

privacy, sat down among twenty others, our friend saw in his

companion's move a fear of the advent of Waymarsh. It was the first

time Chad had to that extent given this personage "away"; and

Strether found himself wondering of what it was symptomatic. He

made out in a moment that the youth was in earnest as he hadn't yet

seen him; which in its turn threw a ray perhaps a trifle startling

on what they had each up to that time been treating as earnestness.

It was sufficiently flattering however that the real thing--if

this WAS at last the real thing--should have been determined, as

appeared, precisely by an accretion of Strether's importance. For

this was what it quickly enough came to--that Chad, rising with the

lark, had rushed down to let him know while his morning

consciousness was yet young that he had literally made the

afternoon before a tremendous impression. Madame de Vionnet

wouldn't, couldn't rest till she should have some assurance from

him that he WOULD consent again to see her. The announcement was

made, across their marble-topped table, while the foam of the hot

milk was in their cups and its plash still in the air, with the

smile of Chad's easiest urbanity; and this expression of his face

caused our friend's doubts to gather on the spot into a challenge

of the lips. "See here"--that was all; he only for the moment said

again "See here." Chad met it with all his air of straight

intelligence, while Strether remembered again that fancy of the

first impression of him, the happy young Pagan, handsome and hard

but oddly indulgent, whose mysterious measure he had under the

street-lamp tried mentally to take. The young Pagan, while a long

look passed between them, sufficiently understood. Strether scarce

needed at last to say the rest--"I want to know where I am." But he

said it, adding before any answer something more. "Are you engaged

to be married--is that your secret?--to the young lady?"

Chad shook his head with the slow amenity that was one of his ways

of conveying that there was time for everything. "I have no secret--

though I may have secrets! I haven't at any rate that one. We're

not engaged. No."

"Then where's the hitch?"

"Do you mean why I haven't already started with you?" Chad,

beginning his coffee and buttering his roll, was quite ready to

explain. "Nothing would have induced me--nothing will still induce

me--not to try to keep you here as long as you can be made to stay.

It's too visibly good for you." Strether had himself plenty to say

about this, but it was amusing also to measure the march of Chad's

tone. He had never been more a man of the world, and it was always

in his company present to our friend that one was seeing how in

successive connexions a man of the world acquitted himself. Chad

kept it up beautifully. "My idea--voyons!--is simply that you

should let Madame de Vionnet know you, simply that you should

consent to know HER. I don't in the least mind telling you that,

clever and charming as she is, she's ever so much in my confidence.

All I ask of you is to let her talk to you. You've asked me about

what you call my hitch, and so far as it goes she'll explain it to

you. She's herself my hitch, hang it--if you must really have it

all out. But in a sense," he hastened in the most wonderful manner

to add, "that you'll quite make out for yourself. She's too good a

friend, confound her. Too good, I mean, for me to leave without--

without--" It was his first hesitation.

"Without what?"

"Well, without my arranging somehow or other the damnable terms of

my sacrifice."

"It WILL be a sacrifice then?"

"It will be the greatest loss I ever suffered. I owe her so much."

It was beautiful, the way Chad said these things, and his plea was

now confessedly--oh quite flagrantly and publicly--interesting. The

moment really took on for Strether an intensity. Chad owed Madame

de Vionnet so much? What DID that do then but clear up the whole

mystery? He was indebted for alterations, and she was thereby in a

position to have sent in her bill for expenses incurred in

reconstruction. What was this at bottom but what had been to be

arrived at? Strether sat there arriving at it while he munched

toast and stirred his second cup. To do this with the aid of Chad's

pleasant earnest face was also to do more besides. No, never before

had he been so ready to take him as he was. What was it that had

suddenly so cleared up? It was just everybody's character; that is

everybody's but--in a measure--his own. Strether felt HIS character

receive for the instant a smutch from all the wrong things he had

suspected or believed. The person to whom Chad owed it that he

could positively turn out such a comfort to other persons--such a

person was sufficiently raised above any "breath" by the nature of

her work and the young man's steady light. All of which was vivid

enough to come and go quickly; though indeed in the midst of it

Strether could utter a question. "Have I your word of honour that

if I surrender myself to Madame de Vionnet you'll surrender

yourself to me?"

Chad laid his hand firmly on his friend's. "My dear man, you have

it."

There was finally something in his felicity almost embarrassing and

oppressive--Strether had begun to fidget under it for the open air

and the erect posture. He had signed to the waiter that he wished

to pay, and this transaction took some moments, during which he

thoroughly felt, while he put down money and pretended--it was

quite hollow--to estimate change, that Chad's higher spirit, his

youth, his practice, his paganism, his felicity, his assurance, his

impudence, whatever it might be, had consciously scored a success.

Well, that was all right so far as it went; his sense of the thing

in question covered our friend for a minute like a veil through

which--as if he had been muffled--he heard his interlocutor ask him

if he mightn't take him over about five. "Over" was over the river,

and over the river was where Madame de Vionnet lived, and five was

that very afternoon. They got at last out of the place--got out

before he answered. He lighted, in the street, a cigarette, which

again gave him more time. But it was already sharp for him that

there was no use in time. "What does she propose to do to me?" he

had presently demanded.

Chad had no delays. "Are you afraid of her?"

"Oh immensely. Don't you see it?"

"Well," said Chad, "she won't do anything worse to you than make

you like her."

"It's just of that I'm afraid."

"Then it's not fair to me."

Strether cast about. "It's fair to your mother."

"Oh," said Chad, "are you afraid of HER?"

"Scarcely less. Or perhaps even more. But is this lady against your

interests at home?" Strether went on.

"Not directly, no doubt; but she's greatly in favour of them here."

"And what--'here'--does she consider them to be?"

"Well, good relations!"

"With herself?"

"With herself."

"And what is it that makes them so good?"

"What? Well, that's exactly what you'll make out if you'll only go,

as I'm supplicating you, to see her."

Strether stared at him with a little of the wanness, no doubt, that

the vision of more to "make out" could scarce help producing. "I

mean HOW good are they?"

"Oh awfully good."

Again Strether had faltered, but it was brief. It was all very

well, but there was nothing now he wouldn't risk. "Excuse me, but I

must really--as I began by telling you--know where I am. Is she

bad?"

"'Bad'?"--Chad echoed it, but without a shock. "Is that what's

implied--?"

"When relations are good?" Strether felt a little silly, and was

even conscious of a foolish laugh, at having it imposed on him to

have appeared to speak so. What indeed was he talking about? His

stare had relaxed; he looked now all round him. But something in

him brought him back, though he still didn't know quite how to turn

it. The two or three ways he thought of, and one of them in

particular, were, even with scruples dismissed, too ugly. He none

the less at last found something. "Is her life without reproach?"

It struck him, directly he had found it, as pompous and priggish;

so much so that he was thankful to Chad for taking it only in the

right spirit. The young man spoke so immensely to the point that

the effect was practically of positive blandness. "Absolutely

without reproach. A beautiful life. Allez donc voir!"

These last words were, in the liberality of their confidence, so

imperative that Strether went through no form of assent; but before

they separated it had been confirmed that he should be picked up at

a quarter to five.

Book Sixth

I

It was quite by half-past five--after the two men had been together

in Madame de Vionnet's drawing-room not more than a dozen minutes--

that Chad, with a look at his watch and then another at their

hostess, said genially, gaily: "I've an engagement, and I know you

won't complain if I leave him with you. He'll interest you

immensely; and as for her," he declared to Strether, "I assure you,

if you're at all nervous, she's perfectly safe."

He had left them to be embarrassed or not by this guarantee, as

they could best manage, and embarrassment was a thing that Strether

wasn't at first sure Madame de Vionnet escaped. He escaped it

himself, to his surprise; but he had grown used by this time to

thinking of himself as brazen. She occupied, his hostess, in the

Rue de Bellechasse, the first floor of an old house to which our

visitors had had access from an old clean court. The court was

large and open, full of revelations, for our friend, of the habit

of privacy, the peace of intervals, the dignity of distances and

approaches; the house, to his restless sense, was in the high

homely style of an elder day, and the ancient Paris that he was

always looking for--sometimes intensely felt, sometimes more

acutely missed--was in the immemorial polish of the wide waxed

staircase and in the fine boiseries, the medallions, mouldings,

mirrors, great clear spaces, of the greyish-white salon into which

he had been shown. He seemed at the very outset to see her in the

midst of possessions not vulgarly numerous, but hereditary

cherished charming. While his eyes turned after a little from those

of his hostess and Chad freely talked--not in the least about HIM,

but about other people, people he didn't know, and quite as if he

did know them--he found himself making out, as a background of the

occupant, some glory, some prosperity of the First Empire, some

Napoleonic glamour, some dim lustre of the great legend; elements

clinging still to all the consular chairs and mythological brasses

and sphinxes' heads and faded surfaces of satin striped with

alternate silk.

The place itself went further back--that he guessed, and how old

Paris continued in a manner to echo there; but the post-revolutionary

period, the world he vaguely thought of as the world of Chateaubriand,

of Madame de Stael, even of the young Lamartine, had left its stamp of

harps and urns and torches, a stamp impressed on sundry small objects,

ornaments and relics. He had never before, to his knowledge, had

present to him relics, of any special dignity, of a private order--

little old miniatures, medallions, pictures, books; books in leather

bindings, pinkish and greenish, with gilt garlands on the back, ranged,

together with other promiscuous properties, under the glass of

brass-mounted cabinets. His attention took them all tenderly into account.

They were among the matters that marked Madame de Vionnet's

apartment as something quite different from Miss Gostrey's little museum

of bargains and from Chad's lovely home; he recognised it as founded

much more on old accumulations that had possibly from time to time

shrunken than on any contemporary method of acquisition or form of

curiosity. Chad and Miss Gostrey had rummaged and purchased and picked

up and exchanged, sifting, selecting, comparing; whereas the mistress of

the scene before him, beautifully passive under the spell of

transmission--transmission from her father's line, he quite made up

his mind--had only received, accepted and been quiet. When she

hadn't been quiet she had been moved at the most to some occult

charity for some fallen fortune. There had been objects she or her

predecessors might even conceivably have parted with under need,

but Strether couldn't suspect them of having sold old pieces to get

"better" ones. They would have felt no difference as to better or

worse. He could but imagine their having felt--perhaps in

emigration, in proscription, for his sketch was slight and

confused--the pressure of want or the obligation of sacrifice.

The pressure of want--whatever might be the case with the other

force--was, however, presumably not active now, for the tokens of a

chastened ease still abounded after all, many marks of a taste

whose discriminations might perhaps have been called eccentric. He

guessed at intense little preferences and sharp little exclusions,

a deep suspicion of the vulgar and a personal view of the right.

The general result of this was something for which he had no name

on the spot quite ready, but something he would have come nearest

to naming in speaking of it as the air of supreme respectability,

the consciousness, small, still, reserved, but none the less

distinct and diffused, of private honour. The air of supreme

respectability--that was a strange blank wall for his adventure to

have brought him to break his nose against. It had in fact, as he

was now aware, filled all the approaches, hovered in the court as

he passed, hung on the staircase as he mounted, sounded in the

grave rumble of the old bell, as little electric as possible, of

which Chad, at the door, had pulled the ancient but neatly-kept

tassel; it formed in short the clearest medium of its particular

kind that he had ever breathed. He would have answered for it at

the end of a quarter of an hour that some of the glass cases

contained swords and epaulettes of ancient colonels and generals;

medals and orders once pinned over hearts that had long since

ceased to beat; snuff-boxes bestowed on ministers and envoys;

copies of works presented, with inscriptions, by authors now

classic. At bottom of it all for him was the sense of her rare

unlikeness to the women he had known. This sense had grown, since

the day before, the more he recalled her, and had been above all

singularly fed by his talk with Chad in the morning. Everything in

fine made her immeasurably new, and nothing so new as the old house

and the old objects. There were books, two or three, on a small

table near his chair, but they hadn't the lemon-coloured covers

with which his eye had begun to dally from the hour of his arrival

and to the opportunity of a further acquaintance with which he had

for a fortnight now altogether succumbed. On another table, across

the room, he made out the great \_Revue\_; but even that familiar face,

conspicuous in Mrs. Newsome's parlours, scarce counted here as a

modern note. He was sure on the spot--and he afterwards knew he was

right--that this was a touch of Chad's own hand. What would Mrs.

Newsome say to the circumstance that Chad's interested "influence"

kept her paper-knife in the \_Revue\_? The interested influence at any

rate had, as we say, gone straight to the point--had in fact soon

left it quite behind.

She was seated, near the fire, on a small stuffed and fringed chair

one of the few modern articles in the room, and she leaned back in

it with her hands clasped in her lap and no movement, in all her

person, but the fine prompt play of her deep young face. The fire,

under the low white marble, undraped and academic, had burnt down

to the silver ashes of light wood, one of the windows, at a

distance, stood open to the mildness and stillness, out of which,

in the short pauses, came the faint sound, pleasant and homely,

almost rustic, of a plash and a clatter of sabots from some

coach-house on the other side of the court. Madame de Vionnet,

while Strether sat there, wasn't to shift her posture by an inch.

"I don't think you seriously believe in what you're doing," she

said; "but all the same, you know, I'm going to treat you quite as

if I did."

"By which you mean," Strether directly replied, "quite as if you

didn't! I assure you it won't make the least difference with me how

you treat me."

"Well," she said, taking that menace bravely and

philosophically enough, "the only thing that really matters is that

you shall get on with me."

"Ah but I don't!" he immediately returned.

It gave her another pause; which, however, she happily enough shook

off. "Will you consent to go on with me a little--provisionally--

as if you did?"

Then it was that he saw how she had decidedly come all the way; and

there accompanied it an extraordinary sense of her raising from

somewhere below him her beautiful suppliant eyes. He might have

been perched at his door-step or at his window and she standing in

the road. For a moment he let her stand and couldn't moreover have

spoken. It had been sad, of a sudden, with a sadness that was like

a cold breath in his face. "What can I do," he finally asked, "but

listen to you as I promised Chadwick?"

"Ah but what I'm asking you," she quickly said, "isn't what Mr.

Newsome had in mind." She spoke at present, he saw, as if to take

courageously ALL her risk. "This is my own idea and a different

thing."

It gave poor Strether in truth--uneasy as it made him too--

something of the thrill of a bold perception justified. "Well," he

answered kindly enough, "I was sure a moment since that some idea

of your own had come to you."

She seemed still to look up at him, but now more serenely. "I made

out you were sure--and that helped it to come. So you see," she

continued, "we do get on."

"Oh but it appears to me I don't at all meet your request. How can

I when I don't understand it?"

"It isn't at all necessary you should understand; it will do quite

well enough if you simply remember it. Only feel I trust you--and

for nothing so tremendous after all. Just," she said with a

wonderful smile, "for common civility."

Strether had a long pause while they sat again face to face, as

they had sat, scarce less conscious, before the poor lady had

crossed the stream. She was the poor lady for Strether now because

clearly she had some trouble, and her appeal to him could only mean

that her trouble was deep. He couldn't help it; it wasn't his

fault; he had done nothing; but by a turn of the hand she had

somehow made their encounter a relation. And the relation profited

by a mass of things that were not strictly in it or of it; by the

very air in which they sat, by the high cold delicate room, by the

world outside and the little plash in the court, by the First

Empire and the relics in the stiff cabinets, by matters as far off

as those and by others as near as the unbroken clasp of her hands

in her lap and the look her expression had of being most natural

when her eyes were most fixed. "You count upon me of course for

something really much greater than it sounds."

"Oh it sounds great enough too!" she laughed at this.

He found himself in time on the point of telling her that she was,

as Miss Barrace called it, wonderful; but, catching himself up, he

said something else instead. "What was it Chad's idea then that you

should say to me?"

"Ah his idea was simply what a man's idea always is--to put every

effort off on the woman."

"The 'woman'--?" Strether slowly echoed.

"The woman he likes--and just in proportion as he likes her. In

proportion too--for shifting the trouble--as she likes HIM."

Strether followed it; then with an abruptness of his own:

"How much do you like Chad?"

"Just as much as THAT--to take all, with you, on myself." But she

got at once again away from this. "I've been trembling as if we

were to stand or fall by what you may think of me; and I'm even

now," she went on wonderfully, "drawing a long breath--and, yes,

truly taking a great courage--from the hope that I don't in fact

strike you as impossible."

"That's at all events, clearly," he observed after an instant, "the

way I don't strike YOU."

"Well," she so far assented, "as you haven't yet said you WON'T

have the little patience with me I ask for--"

"You draw splendid conclusions? Perfectly. But I don't understand

them," Strether pursued. "You seem to me to ask for much more than

you need. What, at the worst for you, what at the best for myself,

can I after all do? I can use no pressure that I haven't used. You

come really late with your request. I've already done all that for

myself the case admits of. I've said my say, and here I am."

"Yes, here you are, fortunately!" Madame de Vionnet laughed. "Mrs.

Newsome," she added in another tone, "didn't think you can do so

little."

He had an hesitation, but he brought the words out. "Well, she

thinks so now."

"Do you mean by that--?" But she also hung fire.

"Do I mean what?"

She still rather faltered. "Pardon me if I touch on it, but if I'm

saying extraordinary things, why, perhaps, mayn't I? Besides,

doesn't it properly concern us to know?"

"To know what?" he insisted as after thus beating about the bush

she had again dropped.

She made the effort. "Has she given you up?"

He was amazed afterwards to think how simply and quietly he had met

it. "Not yet." It was almost as if he were a trifle disappointed--

had expected still more of her freedom. But he went straight on.

"Is that what Chad has told you will happen to me?"

She was evidently charmed with the way he took it. "If you mean if

we've talked of it--most certainly. And the question's not what has

had least to do with my wishing to see you."

"To judge if I'm the sort of man a woman CAN--?"

"Precisely," she exclaimed--"you wonderful gentleman! I do judge--I

HAVE judged. A woman can't. You're safe--with every right to be.

You'd be much happier if you'd only believe it."

Strether was silent a little; then he found himself speaking with a

cynicism of confidence of which even at the moment the sources were

strange to him. "I try to believe it. But it's a marvel," he

exclaimed, "how YOU already get at it!"

Oh she was able to say. "Remember how much I was on the way to it

through Mr. Newsome--before I saw you. He thinks everything of your

strength."

"Well, I can bear almost anything!" our friend briskly interrupted.

Deep and beautiful on this her smile came back, and with the effect

of making him hear what he had said just as she had heard it. He

easily enough felt that it gave him away, but what in truth had

everything done but that? It had been all very well to think at

moments that he was holding her nose down and that he had coerced

her: what had he by this time done but let her practically see that

he accepted their relation? What was their relation moreover--

though light and brief enough in form as yet--but whatever she

might choose to make it? Nothing could prevent her--certainly he

couldn't--from making it pleasant. At the back of his head, behind

everything, was the sense that she was--there, before him, close to

him, in vivid imperative form--one of the rare women he had so

often heard of, read of, thought of, but never met, whose very

presence, look, voice, the mere contemporaneous FACT of whom, from

the moment it was at all presented, made a relation of mere

recognition. That was not the kind of woman he had ever found Mrs.

Newsome, a contemporaneous fact who had been distinctly slow to

establish herself; and at present, confronted with Madame de

Vionnet, he felt the simplicity of his original impression of Miss

Gostrey. She certainly had been a fact of rapid growth; but the

world was wide, each day was more and more a new lesson. There were

at any rate even among the stranger ones relations and relations.

"Of course I suit Chad's grand way," he quickly added. "He hasn't

had much difficulty in working me in."

She seemed to deny a little, on the young man's behalf, by the rise

of her eyebrows, an intention of any process at all inconsiderate.

"You must know how grieved he'd be if you were to lose anything. He

believes you can keep his mother patient."

Strether wondered with his eyes on her. "I see. THAT'S then what

you really want of me. And how am I to do it? Perhaps you'll tell

me that."

"Simply tell her the truth."

"And what do you call the truth?"

"Well, any truth--about us all--that you see yourself. I leave it

to you."

"Thank you very much. I like," Strether laughed with a slight

harshness, "the way you leave things!"

But she insisted kindly, gently, as if it wasn't so bad. "Be

perfectly honest. Tell her all."

"All?" he oddly echoed.

"Tell her the simple truth," Madame de Vionnet again pleaded.

"But what is the simple truth? The simple truth is exactly what I'm

trying to discover."

She looked about a while, but presently she came back to him. "Tell

her, fully and clearly, about US."

Strether meanwhile had been staring. "You and your daughter?"

"Yes--little Jeanne and me. Tell her," she just slightly quavered,

"you like us."

"And what good will that do me? Or rather"--he caught himself up--

"what good will it do YOU?"

She looked graver. "None, you believe, really?"

Strether debated. "She didn't send me out to 'like' you."

"Oh," she charmingly contended, "she sent you out to face the

facts."

He admitted after an instant that there was something in that. "But

how can I face them till I know what they are? Do you want him," he

then braced himself to ask, "to marry your daughter?"

She gave a headshake as noble as it was prompt. "No--not that."

"And he really doesn't want to himself?"

She repeated the movement, but now with a strange light in her

face. "He likes her too much."

Strether wondered. "To be willing to consider, you mean, the

question of taking her to America?"

"To be willing to do anything with her but be immensely kind and

nice--really tender of her. We watch over her, and you must help

us. You must see her again."

Strether felt awkward. "Ah with pleasure--she's so remarkably

attractive."

The mother's eagerness with which Madame de Vionnet jumped at this

was to come back to him later as beautiful in its grace. "The dear

thing DID please you?" Then as he met it with the largest "Oh!" of

enthusiasm: "She's perfect. She's my joy."

"Well, I'm sure that--if one were near her and saw more of her--

she'd be mine."

"Then," said Madame de Vionnet, "tell Mrs. Newsome that!"

He wondered the more. "What good will that do you?" As she appeared

unable at once to say, however, he brought out something else. "Is

your daughter in love with our friend?"

"Ah," she rather startlingly answered, "I wish you'd find out!"

He showed his surprise. "I? A stranger?"

"Oh you won't be a stranger--presently. You shall see her quite, I

assure you, as if you weren't."

It remained for him none the less an extraordinary notion. "It

seems to me surely that if her mother can't--"

"Ah little girls and their mothers to-day!" she rather inconsequently

broke in. But she checked herself with something she seemed to give

out as after all more to the point. "Tell her I've been good for

him. Don't you think I have?"

It had its effect on him--more than at the moment he quite measured.

Yet he was consciously enough touched. "Oh if it's all you--!"

"Well, it may not be 'all,'" she interrupted, "but it's to a great

extent. Really and truly," she added in a tone that was to take its

place with him among things remembered.

"Then it's very wonderful." He smiled at her from a face that he

felt as strained, and her own face for a moment kept him so. At

last she also got up. "Well, don't you think that for that--"

"I ought to save you?" So it was that the way to meet her--and the

way, as well, in a manner, to get off--came over him. He heard

himself use the exorbitant word, the very sound of which helped to

determine his flight. "I'll save you if I can."

II

In Chad's lovely home, however, one evening ten days later, he felt

himself present at the collapse of the question of Jeanne de Vionnet's

shy secret. He had been dining there in the company of that young

lady and her mother, as well as of other persons, and he had gone

into the petit salon, at Chad's request, on purpose to talk with her.

The young man had put this to him as a favour--"I should like so

awfully to know what you think of her. It will really be a chance

for you," he had said, "to see the jeune fille--I mean the type--as she

actually is, and I don't think that, as an observer of manners,

it's a thing you ought to miss. It will be an impression that--

whatever else you take--you can carry home with you, where you'll

find again so much to compare it with."

Strether knew well enough with what Chad wished him to compare it,

and though he entirely assented he hadn't yet somehow been so

deeply reminded that he was being, as he constantly though mutely

expressed it, used. He was as far as ever from making out exactly

to what end; but he was none the less constantly accompanied by a

sense of the service he rendered. He conceived only that this

service was highly agreeable to those who profited by it; and he

was indeed still waiting for the moment at which he should catch it

in the act of proving disagreeable, proving in some degree

intolerable, to himself. He failed quite to see how his situation

could clear up at all logically except by some turn of events that

would give him the pretext of disgust. He was building from day to

day on the possibility of disgust, but each day brought forth

meanwhile a new and more engaging bend of the road. That

possibility was now ever so much further from sight than on the eve

of his arrival, and he perfectly felt that, should it come at all,

it would have to be at best inconsequent and violent. He struck

himself as a little nearer to it only when he asked himself what

service, in such a life of utility, he was after all rendering

Mrs. Newsome. When he wished to help himself to believe that he was

still all right he reflected--and in fact with wonder--on the

unimpaired frequency of their correspondence; in relation to which

what was after all more natural than that it should become more

frequent just in proportion as their problem became more complicated?

Certain it is at any rate that he now often brought himself balm by

the question, with the rich consciousness of yesterday's letter,

"Well, what can I do more than that--what can I do more than tell

her everything?" To persuade himself that he did tell her, had told

her, everything, he used to try to think of particular things he

hadn't told her. When at rare moments and in the watches of the

night he pounced on one it generally showed itself to be--to a

deeper scrutiny--not quite truly of the essence. When anything new

struck him as coming up, or anything already noted as reappearing,

he always immediately wrote, as if for fear that if he didn't he

would miss something; and also that he might be able to say to

himself from time to time "She knows it NOW--even while I worry."

It was a great comfort to him in general not to have left past

things to be dragged to light and explained; not to have to produce

at so late a stage anything not produced, or anything even veiled

and attenuated, at the moment. She knew it now: that was what he

said to himself to-night in relation to the fresh fact of Chad's

acquaintance with the two ladies--not to speak of the fresher one

of his own. Mrs. Newsome knew in other words that very night at

Woollett that he himself knew Madame de Vionnet and that he had

conscientiously been to see her; also that he had found her

remarkably attractive and that there would probably be a good deal

more to tell. But she further knew, or would know very soon, that,

again conscientiously, he hadn't repeated his visit; and that when

Chad had asked him on the Countess's behalf--Strether made her out

vividly, with a thought at the back of his head, a Countess--if he

wouldn't name a day for dining with her, he had replied lucidly:

"Thank you very much--impossible." He had begged the young man

would present his excuses and had trusted him to understand that it

couldn't really strike one as quite the straight thing. He hadn't

reported to Mrs. Newsome that he had promised to "save" Madame de

Vionnet; but, so far as he was concerned with that reminiscence, he

hadn't at any rate promised to haunt her house. What Chad had

understood could only, in truth, be inferred from Chad's behaviour,

which had been in this connexion as easy as in every other. He was

easy, always, when he understood; he was easier still, if possible,

when he didn't; he had replied that he would make it all right; and

he had proceeded to do this by substituting the present occasion--

as he was ready to substitute others--for any, for every occasion

as to which his old friend should have a funny scruple.

"Oh but I'm not a little foreign girl; I'm just as English as I can be,"

Jeanne de Vionnet had said to him as soon as, in the petit salon,

he sank, shyly enough on his own side, into the place near her

vacated by Madame Gloriani at his approach. Madame Gloriani,

who was in black velvet, with white lace and powdered hair, and

whose somewhat massive majesty melted, at any contact, into the

graciousness of some incomprehensible tongue, moved away to make

room for the vague gentleman, after benevolent greetings to him

which embodied, as he believed, in baffling accents, some

recognition of his face from a couple of Sundays before. Then he

had remarked--making the most of the advantage of his years--that

it frightened him quite enough to find himself dedicated to the

entertainment of a little foreign girl. There were girls he wasn't

afraid of--he was quite bold with little Americans. Thus it was

that she had defended herself to the end--"Oh but I'm almost

American too. That's what mamma has wanted me to be--I mean LIKE

that; for she has wanted me to have lots of freedom. She has known

such good results from it."

She was fairly beautiful to him--a faint pastel in an oval frame:

he thought of her already as of some lurking image in a long

gallery, the portrait of a small old-time princess of whom nothing

was known but that she had died young. Little Jeanne wasn't,

doubtless, to die young, but one couldn't, all the same, bear on

her lightly enough. It was bearing hard, it was bearing as HE, in

any case, wouldn't bear, to concern himself, in relation to her,

with the question of a young man. Odious really the question of a

young man; one didn't treat such a person as a maid-servant

suspected of a "follower." And then young men, young men--well, the

thing was their business simply, or was at all events hers. She was

fluttered, fairly fevered--to the point of a little glitter that

came and went in her eyes and a pair of pink spots that stayed in

her cheeks--with the great adventure of dining out and with the

greater one still, possibly, of finding a gentleman whom she must

think of as very, very old, a gentleman with eye-glasses, wrinkles,

a long grizzled moustache. She spoke the prettiest English, our

friend thought, that he had ever heard spoken, just as he had

believed her a few minutes before to be speaking the prettiest

French. He wondered almost wistfully if such a sweep of the lyre

didn't react on the spirit itself; and his fancy had in fact,

before he knew it, begun so to stray and embroider that he finally

found himself, absent and extravagant, sitting with the child in a

friendly silence. Only by this time he felt her flutter to have

fortunately dropped and that she was more at her ease. She trusted

him, liked him, and it was to come back to him afterwards that she

had told him things. She had dipped into the waiting medium at last

and found neither surge nor chill--nothing but the small splash she

could herself make in the pleasant warmth, nothing but the safety

of dipping and dipping again. At the end of the ten minutes he was

to spend with her his impression--with all it had thrown off and

all it had taken in--was complete. She had been free, as she knew

freedom, partly to show him that, unlike other little persons she

knew, she had imbibed that ideal. She was delightfully quaint about

herself, but the vision of what she had imbibed was what most held

him. It really consisted, he was soon enough to feel, in just one

great little matter, the fact that, whatever her nature, she was

thoroughly--he had to cast about for the word, but it came--bred.

He couldn't of course on so short an acquaintance speak for her

nature, but the idea of breeding was what she had meanwhile dropped

into his mind. He had never yet known it so sharply presented. Her

mother gave it, no doubt; but her mother, to make that less sensible,

gave so much else besides, and on neither of the two previous occasions,

extraordinary woman, Strether felt, anything like what she was giving

tonight. Little Jeanne was a case, an exquisite case of education;

whereas the Countess, whom it so amused him to think of by that

denomination, was a case, also exquisite, of--well, he didn't know what.

"He has wonderful taste, notre jeune homme": this was what Gloriani

said to him on turning away from the inspection of a small picture

suspended near the door of the room. The high celebrity in question

had just come in, apparently in search of Mademoiselle de Vionnet,

but while Strether had got up from beside her their fellow guest,

with his eye sharply caught, had paused for a long look. The thing

was a landscape, of no size, but of the French school, as our

friend was glad to feel he knew, and also of a quality--which he

liked to think he should also have guessed; its frame was large out

of proportion to the canvas, and he had never seen a person look at

anything, he thought, just as Gloriani, with his nose very near and

quick movements of the head from side to side and bottom to top,

examined this feature of Chad's collection. The artist used that

word the next moment smiling courteously, wiping his nippers and

looking round him further--paying the place in short by the very

manner of his presence and by something Strether fancied he could

make out in this particular glance, such a tribute as, to the

latter's sense, settled many things once for all. Strether was

conscious at this instant, for that matter, as he hadn't yet been,

of how, round about him, quite without him, they WERE consistently

settled. Gloriani's smile, deeply Italian, he considered, and

finely inscrutable, had had for him, during dinner, at which they

were not neighbours, an indefinite greeting; but the quality in it

was gone that had appeared on the other occasion to turn him inside

out; it was as if even the momentary link supplied by the doubt

between them had snapped. He was conscious now of the final

reality, which was that there wasn't so much a doubt as a

difference altogether; all the more that over the difference the

famous sculptor seemed to signal almost condolingly, yet oh how

vacantly! as across some great flat sheet of water. He threw out

the bridge of a charming hollow civility on which Strether wouldn't

have trusted his own full weight a moment. That idea, even though

but transient and perhaps belated, had performed the office of

putting Strether more at his ease, and the blurred picture had

already dropped--dropped with the sound of something else said and

with his becoming aware, by another quick turn, that Gloriani was

now on the sofa talking with Jeanne, while he himself had in his

ears again the familiar friendliness and the elusive meaning of the

"Oh, oh, oh!" that had made him, a fortnight before, challenge Miss

Barrace in vain. She had always the air, this picturesque and

original lady, who struck him, so oddly, as both antique and

modern--she had always the air of taking up some joke that one had

already had out with her. The point itself, no doubt, was what was

antique, and the use she made of it what was modern. He felt just

now that her good-natured irony did bear on something, and it

troubled him a little that she wouldn't be more explicit only

assuring him, with the pleasure of observation so visible in her,

that she wouldn't tell him more for the world. He could take refuge

but in asking her what she had done with Waymarsh, though it must

be added that he felt himself a little on the way to a clue after

she had answered that this personage was, in the other room,

engaged in conversation with Madame de Vionnet. He stared a moment

at the image of such a conjunction; then, for Miss Barrace's

benefit, he wondered. "Is she too then under the charm--?"

"No, not a bit"--Miss Barrace was prompt. "She makes nothing of him.

She's bored. She won't help you with him."

"Oh," Strether laughed, "she can't do everything.

"Of course not--wonderful as she is. Besides, he makes nothing of

HER. She won't take him from me--though she wouldn't, no doubt,

having other affairs in hand, even if she could. I've never," said

Miss Barrace, "seen her fail with any one before. And to-night,

when she's so magnificent, it would seem to her strange--if she

minded. So at any rate I have him all. Je suis tranquille!''

Strether understood, so far as that went; but he was feeling for

his clue. "She strikes you to-night as particularly magnificent?"

"Surely. Almost as I've never seen her. Doesn't she you?

Why it's FOR you."

He persisted in his candour. "'For' me--?"

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried Miss Barrace, who persisted in the opposite of

that quality.

"Well," he acutely admitted, "she IS different. She's gay. "

"She's gay!" Miss Barrace laughed. "And she has beautiful

shoulders--though there's nothing different in that."

"No," said Strether, "one was sure of her shoulders.

It isn't her shoulders."

His companion, with renewed mirth and the finest sense, between

the puffs of her cigarette, of the drollery of things, appeared to

find their conversation highly delightful. "Yes, it isn't

her shoulders ."

"What then is it?" Strether earnestly enquired.

"Why, it's SHE--simply. It's her mood. It's her charm."

"Of course it's her charm, but we're speaking of the difference."

"Well," Miss Barrace explained, "she's just brilliant, as we used

to say. That's all. She's various. She's fifty women."

"Ah but only one"--Strether kept it clear--"at a time."

"Perhaps. But in fifty times--!"

"Oh we shan't come to that," our friend declared; and the next

moment he had moved in another direction. "Will you answer me a

plain question? Will she ever divorce?"

Miss Barrace looked at him through all her tortoise-shell. "Why

should she?"

It wasn't what he had asked for, he signified; but he met it well

enough. "To marry Chad."

"Why should she marry Chad?"

"Because I'm convinced she's very fond of him. She has done wonders

for him."

"Well then, how could she do more? Marrying a man, or woman

either," Miss Barrace sagely went on, "is never the wonder for any

Jack and Jill can bring THAT off. The wonder is their doing such

things without marrying."

Strether considered a moment this proposition. "You mean it's so

beautiful for our friends simply to go on so?"

But whatever he said made her laugh. "Beautiful."

He nevertheless insisted. "And THAT because it's disinterested?"

She was now, however, suddenly tired of the question. "Yes then--

call it that. Besides, she'll never divorce. Don't, moreover," she

added, "believe everything you hear about her husband."

He's not then," Strether asked, "a wretch?"

"Oh yes. But charming."

"Do you know him?"

"I've met him. He's bien aimable."

"To every one but his wife?"

"Oh for all I know, to her too--to any, to every woman. I hope you

at any rate," she pursued with a quick change, "appreciate the care

I take of Mr. Waymarsh."

"Oh immensely." But Strether was not yet in line. "At all events,"

he roundly brought out, "the attachment's an innocent one."

"Mine and his? Ah," she laughed, "don't rob it of ALL interest!"

"I mean our friend's here--to the lady we've been speaking of."

That was what he had settled to as an indirect but none the less

closely involved consequence of his impression of Jeanne. That was

where he meant to stay. "It's innocent," he repeated--"I see the

whole thing."

Mystified by his abrupt declaration, she had glanced over at

Gloriani as at the unnamed subject of his allusion, but the next

moment she had understood; though indeed not before Strether had

noticed her momentary mistake and wondered what might possibly be

behind that too. He already knew that the sculptor admired Madame

de Vionnet; but did this admiration also represent an attachment of

which the innocence was discussable? He was moving verily in a

strange air and on ground not of the firmest. He looked hard for an

instant at Miss Barrace, but she had already gone on. "All right

with Mr. Newsome? Why of course she is!"--and she got gaily back

to the question of her own good friend. "I dare say you're

surprised that I'm not worn out with all I see--it being so much!--

of Sitting Bull. But I'm not, you know--I don't mind him; I bear

up, and we get on beautifully. I'm very strange; I'm like that; and

often I can't explain. There are people who are supposed

interesting or remarkable or whatever, and who bore me to death;

and then there are others as to whom nobody can understand what

anybody sees in them--in whom I see no end of things." Then after

she had smoked a moment, "He's touching, you know," she said.

"'Know'?" Strether echoed--"don't I, indeed? We must move you

almost to tears."

"Oh but I don't mean YOU!" she laughed.

"You ought to then, for the worst sign of all--as I must have it

for you--is that you can't help me. That's when a woman pities."

"Ah but I do help you!" she cheerfully insisted.

Again he looked at her hard, and then after a pause: "No you

don't!"

Her tortoise-shell, on its long chain, rattled down. "I help you

with Sitting Bull. That's a good deal."

"Oh that, yes." But Strether hesitated. "Do you mean he talks of

me?"

"So that I have to defend you? No, never.'

"I see," Strether mused. "It's too deep."

"That's his only fault," she returned--"that everything, with him,

is too deep. He has depths of silence--which he breaks only at the

longest intervals by a remark. And when the remark comes it's

always something he has seen or felt for himself--never a bit banal

THAT would be what one might have feared and what would kill me But

never." She smoked again as she thus, with amused complacency,

appreciated her acquisition. "And never about you. We keep clear of

you. We're wonderful. But I'll tell you what he does do," she

continued: "he tries to make me presents."

"Presents?" poor Strether echoed, conscious with a pang that HE

hadn't yet tried that in any quarter.

"Why you see," she explained, "he's as fine as ever in the

victoria; so that when I leave him, as I often do almost for hours

--he likes it so--at the doors of shops, the sight of him there

helps me, when I come out, to know my carriage away off in the

rank. But sometimes, for a change, he goes with me into the shops,

and then I've all I can do to prevent his buying me things."

"He wants to 'treat' you?" Strether almost gasped at all he himself

hadn't thought of. He had a sense of admiration. "Oh he's much more

in the real tradition than I. Yes," he mused, "it's the sacred rage."

"The sacred rage, exactly!"--and Miss Barrace, who hadn't before

heard this term applied, recognised its bearing with a clap of her

gemmed hands. "Now I do know why he's not banal. But I do prevent

him all the same--and if you saw what he sometimes selects--from

buying. I save him hundreds and hundreds. I only take flowers."

"Flowers?" Strether echoed again with a rueful reflexion. How many

nosegays had her present converser sent?

"Innocent flowers," she pursued, "as much as he likes. And he sends

me splendours; he knows all the best places--he has found them for

himself; he's wonderful."

"He hasn't told them to me," her friend smiled, "he has a life of

his own." But Strether had swung back to the consciousness that for

himself after all it never would have done. Waymarsh hadn't Mrs.

Waymarsh in the least to consider, whereas Lambert Strether had

constantly, in the inmost honour of his thoughts, to consider Mrs.

Newsome. He liked moreover to feel how much his friend was in the

real tradition. Yet he had his conclusion. "WHAT a rage it is!"

He had worked it out. "It's an opposition."

She followed, but at a distance. "That's what I feel. Yet to what?"

"Well, he thinks, you know, that I'VE a life of my own. And I haven't!"

"You haven't?" She showed doubt, and her laugh confirmed it.

"Oh, oh, oh!"

"No--not for myself. I seem to have a life only for other people."

"Ah for them and WITH them! Just now for instance with--"

"Well, with whom?" he asked before she had had time to say.

His tone had the effect of making her hesitate and even, as he

guessed, speak with a difference. "Say with Miss Gostrey. What do

you do for HER?" It really made him wonder. "Nothing at all!"

III

Madame de Vionnet, having meanwhile come in, was at present

close to them, and Miss Barrace hereupon, instead of risking a

rejoinder, became again with a look that measured her from top to

toe all mere long-handled appreciative tortoise-shell. She had

struck our friend, from the first of her appearing, as dressed for

a great occasion, and she met still more than on either of the

others the conception reawakened in him at their garden-party, the

idea of the femme du monde in her habit as she lived. Her bare

shoulders and arms were white and beautiful; the materials of her

dress, a mixture, as he supposed, of silk and crape, were of a

silvery grey so artfully composed as to give an impression of warm

splendour; and round her neck she wore a collar of large old

emeralds, the green note of which was more dimly repeated, at other

points of her apparel, in embroidery, in enamel, in satin, in

substances and textures vaguely rich. Her head, extremely fair and

exquisitely festal, was like a happy fancy, a notion of the

antique, on an old precious medal, some silver coin of the

Renaissance; while her slim lightness and brightness, her gaiety,

her expression, her decision, contributed to an effect that might

have been felt by a poet as half mythological and half conventional.

He could have compared her to a goddess still partly engaged

in a morning cloud, or to a sea-nymph waist-high in the summer surge.

Above all she suggested to him the reflexion that the femme du monde--

in these finest developments of the type--was, like Cleopatra

in the play, indeed various and multifold. She had aspects, characters,

days, nights--or had them at least, showed them by a mysterious law

of her own, when in addition to everything she happened also to be

a woman of genius. She was an obscure person, a muffled person one day,

and a showy person, an uncovered person the next. He thought of

Madame de Vionnet to-night as showy and uncovered, though he felt

the formula rough, because, thanks to one of the short-cuts of genius

she had taken all his categories by surprise. Twice during dinner

he had met Chad's eyes in a longish look; but these communications

had in truth only stirred up again old ambiguities--so little was it

clear from them whether they were an appeal or an admonition.

"You see how I'm fixed," was what they appeared to convey; yet how

he was fixed was exactly what Strether didn't see. However, perhaps

he should see now.

"Are you capable of the very great kindness of going to relieve

Newsome, for a few minutes, of the rather crushing responsibility

of Madame Gloriani, while I say a word, if he'll allow me, to

Mr. Strether, of whom I've a question to ask? Our host ought to talk

a bit to those other ladies, and I'll come back in a minute to your

rescue." She made this proposal to Miss Barrace as if her

consciousness of a special duty had just flickered-up, but that

lady's recognition of Strether's little start at it--as at a

betrayal on the speaker's part of a domesticated state--was as mute

as his own comment; and after an instant, when their fellow guest

had good-naturedly left them, he had been given something else to

think of. "Why has Maria so suddenly gone? Do you know?" That was

the question Madame de Vionnet had brought with her.

"I'm afraid I've no reason to give you but the simple reason I've

had from her in a note--the sudden obligation to join in the south

a sick friend who has got worse."

"Ah then she has been writing you?"

"Not since she went--I had only a brief explanatory word before she

started. I went to see her," Strether explained--"it was the day

after I called on you--but she was already on her way, and her

concierge told me that in case of my coming I was to be informed

she had written to me. I found her note when I got home."

Madame de Vionnet listened with interest and with her eyes on

Strether's face; then her delicately decorated head had a small

melancholy motion. "She didn't write to ME. I went to see her," she

added, "almost immediately after I had seen you, and as I assured

her I would do when I met her at Gloriani's. She hadn't then told

me she was to be absent, and I felt at her door as if I understood.

She's absent--with all respect to her sick friend, though I know

indeed she has plenty--so that I may not see her. She doesn't want

to meet me again. Well," she continued with a beautiful conscious

mildness, "I liked and admired her beyond every one in the old

time, and she knew it--perhaps that's precisely what has made her go--

and I dare say I haven't lost her for ever." Strether still said

nothing; he had a horror, as he now thought of himself, of being

in question between women--was in fact already quite enough on his

way to that, and there was moreover, as it came to him, perceptibly,

something behind these allusions and professions that, should he

take it in, would square but ill with his present resolve to simplify.

It was as if, for him, all the same, her softness and sadness

were sincere. He felt that not less when she soon went on:

"I'm extremely glad of her happiness." But it also left him mute--

sharp and fine though the imputation it conveyed. What it conveyed

was that HE was Maria Gostrey's happiness, and for the least little

instant he had the impulse to challenge the thought. He could have

done so however only by saying "What then do you suppose to be

between us?" and he was wonderfully glad a moment later not to have

spoken. He would rather seem stupid any day than fatuous, and he

drew back as well, with a smothered inward shudder, from the

consideration of what women--of highly-developed type in particular--

might think of each other. Whatever he had come out for he hadn't

come to go into that; so that he absolutely took up nothing his

interlocutress had now let drop. Yet, though he had kept away from her

for days, had laid wholly on herself the burden of their meeting again,

she hadn't a gleam of irritation to show him. "Well, about Jeanne now?"

she smiled--it had the gaiety with which she had originally come in.

He felt it on the instant to represent her motive and real errand.

But he had been schooling her of a truth to say much in proportion to

his little. "Do you make out that she has a sentiment? I mean for

Mr. Newsome."

Almost resentful, Strether could at last be prompt. "How can I make

out such things?"

She remained perfectly good-natured. "Ah but they're beautiful

little things, and you make out--don't pretend--everything in the

world. Haven't you," she asked, "been talking with her?"

"Yes, but not about Chad. At least not much."

"Oh you don't require 'much'!" she reassuringly declared. But she

immediately changed her ground. "I hope you remember your promise

of the other day."

"To 'save' you, as you called it?"

"I call it so still. You WILL?" she insisted. "You haven't repented?"

He wondered. "No--but I've been thinking what I meant."

She kept it up. "And not, a little, what I did?"

"No--that's not necessary. It will be enough if I know what I

meant myself."

"And don't you know," she asked, "by this time?"

Again he had a pause. "I think you ought to leave it to me.

But how long," he added, "do you give me?"

"It seems to me much more a question of how long you give ME.

Doesn't our friend here himself, at any rate," she went on,

"perpetually make me present to you?"

"Not," Strether replied, "by ever speaking of you to me."

"He never does that?"

"Never."

She considered, and, if the fact was disconcerting to her,

effectually concealed it. The next minute indeed she had recovered.

"No, he wouldn't. But do you NEED that?"

Her emphasis was wonderful, and though his eyes had been wandering

he looked at her longer now. "I see what you mean."

"Of course you see what I mean."

Her triumph was gentle, and she really had tones to make justice

weep. "I've before me what he owes you."

"Admit then that that's something," she said, yet still with the

same discretion in her pride.

He took in this note but went straight on. "You've made of him what

I see, but what I don't see is how in the world you've done it."

"Ah that's another question!" she smiled. "The point is of what use

is your declining to know me when to know Mr. Newsome--as you do me

the honour to find him--IS just to know me."

"I see," he mused, still with his eyes on her. "I shouldn't have

met you to-night."

She raised and dropped her linked hands. "It doesn't matter. If I

trust you why can't you a little trust me too? And why can't you

also," she asked in another tone, "trust yourself?" But she gave

him no time to reply. "Oh I shall be so easy for you! And I'm glad

at any rate you've seen my child."

"I'm glad too," he said; "but she does you no good."

"No good?"--Madame de Vionnet had a clear stare. "Why she's an

angel of light."

"That's precisely the reason. Leave her alone. Don't try to find

out. I mean," he explained, "about what you spoke to me of--

the way she feels."

His companion wondered. "Because one really won't?"

"Well, because I ask you, as a favour to myself, not to. She's the

most charming creature I've ever seen. Therefore don't touch her.

Don't know--don't want to know. And moreover--yes--you won't."

It was an appeal, of a sudden, and she took it in. "As a favour to you?"

"Well--since you ask me."

"Anything, everything you ask," she smiled. "I shan't know then--never.

Thank you," she added with peculiar gentleness as she turned away.

The sound of it lingered with him, making him fairly feel as if he

had been tripped up and had a fall. In the very act of arranging

with her for his independence he had, under pressure from a

particular perception, inconsistently, quite stupidly, committed

himself, and, with her subtlety sensitive on the spot to an

advantage, she had driven in by a single word a little golden nail,

the sharp intention of which he signally felt. He hadn't detached,

he had more closely connected himself, and his eyes, as he

considered with some intensity this circumstance, met another pair

which had just come within their range and which struck him as

reflecting his sense of what he had done. He recognised them at the

same moment as those of little Bilham, who had apparently drawn

near on purpose to speak to him, and little Bilham wasn't, in the

conditions, the person to whom his heart would be most closed.

They were seated together a minute later at the angle of the room

obliquely opposite the corner in which Gloriani was still engaged

with Jeanne de Vionnet, to whom at first and in silence their

attention had been benevolently given. "I can't see for my life,"

Strether had then observed, "how a young fellow of any spirit--such

a one as you for instance--can be admitted to the sight of that

young lady without being hard hit. Why don't you go in, little

Bilham?" He remembered the tone into which he had been betrayed on

the garden-bench at the sculptor's reception, and this might make

up for that by being much more the right sort of thing to say to a

young man worthy of any advice at all. "There WOULD be some

reason."

"Some reason for what?"

"Why for hanging on here."

"To offer my hand and fortune to Mademoiselle de Vionnet?"

"Well," Strether asked, "to what lovelier apparition COULD you

offer them? She's the sweetest little thing I've ever seen."

"She's certainly immense. I mean she's the real thing. I believe

the pale pink petals are folded up there for some wondrous

efflorescence in time; to open, that is, to some great golden sun.

I'M unfortunately but a small farthing candle. What chance in such

a field for a poor little painter-man?"

"Oh you're good enough," Strether threw out.

"Certainly I'm good enough. We're good enough, I consider, nous

autres, for anything. But she's TOO good. There's the difference.

They wouldn't look at me."

Strether, lounging on his divan and still charmed by the young

girl, whose eyes had consciously strayed to him, he fancied, with a

vague smile--Strether, enjoying the whole occasion as with dormant

pulses at last awake and in spite of new material thrust upon him,

thought over his companion's words. "Whom do you mean by 'they'?

She and her mother?"

"She and her mother. And she has a father too, who, whatever else

he may be, certainly can't be indifferent to the possibilities she

represents. Besides, there's Chad."

Strether was silent a little. "Ah but he doesn't care for her--not,

I mean, it appears, after all, in the sense I'm speaking of. He's

NOT in love with her."

"No--but he's her best friend; after her mother. He's very fond

of her. He has his ideas about what can be done for her."

"Well, it's very strange!" Strether presently remarked with a

sighing sense of fulness.

"Very strange indeed. That's just the beauty of it. Isn't it very

much the kind of beauty you had in mind," little Bilham went on,

"when you were so wonderful and so inspiring to me the other day?

Didn't you adjure me, in accents I shall never forget, to see,

while I've a chance, everything I can?--and REALLY to see, for it

must have been that only you meant. Well, you did me no end of

good, and I'm doing my best. I DO make it out a situation."

"So do I!" Strether went on after a moment. But he had the next minute

an inconsequent question. "How comes Chad so mixed up, anyway?"

"Ah, ah, ah!"--and little Bilham fell back on his cushions.

It reminded our friend of Miss Barrace, and he felt again the brush

of his sense of moving in a maze of mystic closed allusions. Yet he

kept hold of his thread. "Of course I understand really; only the

general transformation makes me occasionally gasp. Chad with such a

voice in the settlement of the future of a little countess--no,"

he declared, "it takes more time! You say moreover," he resumed, "that

we're inevitably, people like you and me, out of the running. The

curious fact remains that Chad himself isn't. The situation doesn't

make for it, but in a different one he could have her if he would."

"Yes, but that's only because he's rich and because there's a

possibility of his being richer. They won't think of anything but a

great name or a great fortune."

"Well," said Strether, "he'll have no great fortune on THESE lines.

He must stir his stumps."

"Is that," little Bilham enquired, "what you were saying to

Madame de Vionnet?"

"No--I don't say much to her. Of course, however," Strether

continued, "he can make sacrifices if he likes."

Little Bilham had a pause. "Oh he's not keen for sacrifices; or

thinks, that is, possibly, that he has made enough."

"Well, it IS virtuous," his companion observed with some decision.

"That's exactly," the young man dropped after a moment, "what I mean."

It kept Strether himself silent a little. "I've made it out for

myself," he then went on; "I've really, within the last half-hour,

got hold of it. I understand it in short at last; which at first--

when you originally spoke to me--I didn't. Nor when Chad originally

spoke to me either."

"Oh," said little Bilham, "I don't think that at that time you

believed me."

"Yes--I did; and I believed Chad too. It would have been odious and

unmannerly--as well as quite perverse--if I hadn't. What interest

have you in deceiving me?"

The young man cast about. "What interest have I?"

"Yes. Chad MIGHT have. But you?"

"Ah, ah, ah!" little Bilham exclaimed.

It might, on repetition, as a mystification, have irritated our

friend a little, but he knew, once more, as we have seen, where he

was, and his being proof against everything was only another

attestation that he meant to stay there. "I couldn't, without my

own impression, realise. She's a tremendously clever brilliant

capable woman, and with an extraordinary charm on top of it all--

the charm we surely all of us this evening know what to think of.

It isn't every clever brilliant capable woman that has it. In fact

it's rare with any woman. So there you are," Strether proceeded as

if not for little Bilham's benefit alone. "I understand what a

relation with such a woman--what such a high fine friendship--

may be. It can't be vulgar or coarse, anyway--and that's the point."

"Yes, that's the point," said little Bilham. "It can't be vulgar or

coarse. And, bless us and save us, it ISn't! It's, upon my word,

the very finest thing I ever saw in my life, and the most

distinguished."

Strether, from beside him and leaning back with him as he leaned,

dropped on him a momentary look which filled a short interval and

of which he took no notice. He only gazed before him with intent

participation. "Of course what it has done for him," Strether at

all events presently pursued, "of course what it has done for him--

that is as to HOW it has so wonderfully worked--isn't a thing I

pretend to understand. I've to take it as I find it. There he is."

"There he is!" little Bilham echoed. "And it's really and truly

she. I don't understand either, even with my longer and closer

opportunity. But I'm like you," he added; "I can admire and rejoice

even when I'm a little in the dark. You see I've watched it for

some three years, and especially for this last. He wasn't so bad

before it as I seem to have made out that you think--"

"Oh I don't think anything now!" Strether impatiently broke in:

"that is but what I DO think! I mean that originally, for her to

have cared for him--"

"There must have been stuff in him? Oh yes, there was stuff indeed,

and much more of it than ever showed, I dare say, at home. Still,

you know," the young man in all fairness developed, "there was room

for her, and that's where she came in. She saw her chance and took

it. That's what strikes me as having been so fine. But of course,"

he wound up, "he liked her first."

"Naturally," said Strether.

"I mean that they first met somehow and somewhere--I believe in

some American house--and she, without in the least then intending

it, made her impression. Then with time and opportunity he made

his; and after THAT she was as bad as he."

Strether vaguely took it up. "As 'bad'?"

"She began, that is, to care--to care very much. Alone, and in her

horrid position, she found it, when once she had started, an

interest. It was, it is, an interest, and it did--it continues to

do--a lot for herself as well. So she still cares. She cares in

fact," said little Bilham thoughtfully "more."

Strether's theory that it was none of his business was somehow not

damaged by the way he took this. "More, you mean, than he?" On

which his companion looked round at him, and now for an instant

their eyes met. "More than he?" he repeated.

Little Bilham, for as long, hung fire. "Will you never tell any

one?"

Strether thought. "Whom should I tell?"

"Why I supposed you reported regularly--"

"To people at home?"--Strether took him up. "Well, I won't tell

them this."

The young man at last looked away. "Then she does now care more

than he."

"Oh!" Strether oddly exclaimed.

But his companion immediately met it. "Haven't you after all had

your impression of it? That's how you've got hold of him."

"Ah but I haven't got hold of him!"

"Oh I say!" But it was all little Bilham said.

"It's at any rate none of my business. I mean," Strether explained,

"nothing else than getting hold of him is." It appeared, however,

to strike him as his business to add: "The fact remains

nevertheless that she has saved him."

Little Bilham just waited. "I thought that was what you were to do."

But Strether had his answer ready. "I'm speaking--in connexion with

her--of his manners and morals, his character and life. I'm

speaking of him as a person to deal with and talk with and live

with--speaking of him as a social animal."

"And isn't it as a social animal that you also want him?"

"Certainly; so that it's as if she had saved him FOR us."

"It strikes you accordingly then," the young man threw out, "as for

you all to save HER?"

"Oh for us 'all'--!" Strether could but laugh at that. It brought

him back, however, to the point he had really wished to make.

"They've accepted their situation--hard as it is. They're not free

--at least she's not; but they take what's left to them. It's a

friendship, of a beautiful sort; and that's what makes them so

strong. They're straight, they feel; and they keep each other up.

It's doubtless she, however, who, as you yourself have hinted,

feels it most."

Little Bilham appeared to wonder what he had hinted. "Feels most

that they're straight?"

"Well, feels that SHE is, and the strength that comes from it. She

keeps HIM up--she keeps the whole thing up. When people are able to

it's fine. She's wonderful, wonderful, as Miss Barrace says; and he

is, in his way, too; however, as a mere man, he may sometimes rebel

and not feel that he finds his account in it. She has simply given

him an immense moral lift, and what that can explain is prodigious.

That's why I speak of it as a situation. It IS one, if there ever

was." And Strether, with his head back and his eyes on the ceiling,

seemed to lose himself in the vision of it.

His companion attended deeply. "You state it much better than I

could."

"Oh you see it doesn't concern you."

Little Bilham considered. "I thought you said just now that it

doesn't concern you either."

"Well, it doesn't a bit as Madame de Vionnet's affair. But as we

were again saying just now, what did I come out for but to save

him?"

"Yes--to remove him."

"To save him by removal; to win him over to HIMSELF thinking it

best he shall take up business--thinking he must immediately do

therefore what's necessary to that end."

"Well," said little Bilham after a moment, "you HAVE won him over.

He does think it best. He has within a day or two again said to me

as much."

"And that," Strether asked, "is why you consider that he cares less

than she?"

"Cares less for her than she for him? Yes, that's one of the reasons.

But other things too have given me the impression. A man, don't

you think?" little Bilham presently pursued, "CAN'T, in such

conditions, care so much as a woman. It takes different conditions

to make him, and then perhaps he cares more. Chad," he wound up,

"has his possible future before him."

"Are you speaking of his business future?"

"No--on the contrary; of the other, the future of what you so

justly call their situation. M. de Vionnet may live for ever."

"So that they can't marry?"

The young man waited a moment. "Not being able to marry is all

they've with any confidence to look forward to. A woman--a

particular woman--may stand that strain. But can a man?" he

propounded.

Strether's answer was as prompt as if he had already, for himself,

worked it out. "Not without a very high ideal of conduct. But

that's just what we're attributing to Chad. And how, for that

matter," he mused, "does his going to America diminish the

particular strain? Wouldn't it seem rather to add to it?"

"Out of sight out of mind!" his companion laughed. Then more

bravely: "Wouldn't distance lessen the torment?" But before

Strether could reply, "The thing is, you see, Chad ought to marry!"

he wound up.

Strether, for a little, appeared to think of it. "If you talk of

torments you don't diminish mine!" he then broke out. The next

moment he was on his feet with a question. "He ought to marry

whom?"

Little Bilham rose more slowly. "Well, some one he CAN--some

thoroughly nice girl "

Strether's eyes, as they stood together, turned again to Jeanne.

"Do you mean HER?"

His friend made a sudden strange face. "After being in love with

her mother? No."

"But isn't it exactly your idea that he ISn't in love with her

mother?"

His friend once more had a pause. "Well, he isn't at any rate in

love with Jeanne."

"I dare say not."

"How CAN he be with any other woman?"

"Oh that I admit. But being in love isn't, you know, here"--little

Bilham spoke in friendly reminder--"thought necessary, in strictness,

for marriage."

"And what torment--to call a torment--can there ever possibly be

with a woman like that?" As if from the interest of his own

question Strether had gone on without hearing. "Is it for her to

have turned a man out so wonderfully, too, only for somebody else?"

He appeared to make a point of this, and little Bilham looked at

him now. "When it's for each other that people give things up they

don't miss them." Then he threw off as with an extravagance of

which he was conscious: "Let them face the future together!"

Little Bilham looked at him indeed. "You mean that after all he

shouldn't go back?"

"I mean that if he gives her up--!"

"Yes?"

"Well, he ought to be ashamed of himself." But Strether spoke with

a sound that might have passed for a laugh.

Volume II

Book Seventh

I

It wasn't the first time Strether had sat alone in the great dim

church--still less was it the first of his giving himself up, so

far as conditions permitted, to its beneficent action on his

nerves. He had been to Notre Dame with Waymarsh, he had been there

with Miss Gostrey, he had been there with Chad Newsome, and had

found the place, even in company, such a refuge from the obsession

of his problem that, with renewed pressure from that source, he had

not unnaturally recurred to a remedy meeting the case, for the

moment, so indirectly, no doubt, but so relievingly. He was

conscious enough that it was only for the moment, but good moments--

if he could call them good--still had their value for a man who by

this time struck himself as living almost disgracefully from hand

to mouth. Having so well learnt the way, he had lately made the

pilgrimage more than once by himself--had quite stolen off, taking

an unnoticed chance and making no point of speaking of the

adventure when restored to his friends.

His great friend, for that matter, was still absent, as well as

remarkably silent; even at the end of three weeks Miss Gostrey

hadn't come back. She wrote to him from Mentone, admitting that he

must judge her grossly inconsequent--perhaps in fact for the time

odiously faithless; but asking for patience, for a deferred

sentence, throwing herself in short on his generosity. For her too,

she could assure him, life was complicated--more complicated than

he could have guessed; she had moreover made certain of him--

certain of not wholly missing him on her return--before her

disappearance. If furthermore she didn't burden him with letters it

was frankly because of her sense of the other great commerce he had

to carry on. He himself, at the end of a fortnight, had written

twice, to show how his generosity could be trusted; but he reminded

himself in each case of Mrs. Newsome's epistolary manner at the

times when Mrs. Newsome kept off delicate ground. He sank his

problem, he talked of Waymarsh and Miss Barrace, of little Bilham

and the set over the river, with whom he had again had tea, and he

was easy, for convenience, about Chad and Madame de Vionnet and

Jeanne. He admitted that he continued to see them, he was decidedly

so confirmed a haunter of Chad's premises and that young man's

practical intimacy with them was so undeniably great; but he had

his reason for not attempting to render for Miss Gostrey's benefit

the impression of these last days. That would be to tell her too

much about himself--it being at present just from himself he was

trying to escape.

This small struggle sprang not a little, in its way, from the same

impulse that had now carried him across to Notre Dame; the impulse

to let things be, to give them time to justify themselves or at

least to pass. He was aware of having no errand in such a place but

the desire not to be, for the hour, in certain other places; a

sense of safety, of simplification, which each time he yielded to

it he amused himself by thinking of as a private concession to

cowardice. The great church had no altar for his worship, no direct

voice for his soul; but it was none the less soothing even to

sanctity; for he could feel while there what he couldn't elsewhere,

that he was a plain tired man taking the holiday he had earned. He

was tired, but he wasn't plain--that was the pity and the trouble

of it; he was able, however, to drop his problem at the door very

much as if it had been the copper piece that he deposited, on the

threshold, in the receptacle of the inveterate blind beggar. He

trod the long dim nave, sat in the splendid choir, paused before

the cluttered chapels of the east end, and the mighty monument laid

upon him its spell. He might have been a student under the charm of

a museum--which was exactly what, in a foreign town, in the

afternoon of life, he would have liked to be free to be. This form

of sacrifice did at any rate for the occasion as well as another;

it made him quite sufficiently understand how, within the precinct,

for the real refugee, the things of the world could fall into

abeyance. That was the cowardice, probably--to dodge them, to beg

the question, not to deal with it in the hard outer light; but his

own oblivions were too brief, too vain, to hurt any one but

himself, and he had a vague and fanciful kindness for certain

persons whom he met, figures of mystery and anxiety, and whom, with

observation for his pastime, he ranked as those who were fleeing

from justice. Justice was outside, in the hard light, and injustice

too; but one was as absent as the other from the air of the long

aisles and the brightness of the many altars.

Thus it was at all events that, one morning some dozen days after

the dinner in the Boulevard Malesherbes at which Madame de Vionnet

had been present with her daughter, he was called upon to play his

part in an encounter that deeply stirred his imagination. He had

the habit, in these contemplations, of watching a fellow visitant,

here and there, from a respectable distance, remarking some note of

behaviour, of penitence, of prostration, of the absolved, relieved

state; this was the manner in which his vague tenderness took its

course, the degree of demonstration to which it naturally had to

confine itself. It hadn't indeed so felt its responsibility as when

on this occasion he suddenly measured the suggestive effect of a

lady whose supreme stillness, in the shade of one of the chapels,

he had two or three times noticed as he made, and made once more,

his slow circuit. She wasn't prostrate--not in any degree bowed,

but she was strangely fixed, and her prolonged immobility showed

her, while he passed and paused, as wholly given up to the need,

whatever it was, that had brought her there. She only sat and gazed

before her, as he himself often sat; but she had placed herself, as

he never did, within the focus of the shrine, and she had lost

herself, he could easily see, as he would only have liked to do.

She was not a wandering alien, keeping back more than she gave, but

one of the familiar, the intimate, the fortunate, for whom these

dealings had a method and a meaning. She reminded our friend--since

it was the way of nine tenths of his current impressions to act as

recalls of things imagined--of some fine firm concentrated heroine

of an old story, something he had heard, read, something that, had

he had a hand for drama, he might himself have written, renewing

her courage, renewing her clearness, in splendidly-protected

meditation. Her back, as she sat, was turned to him, but his

impression absolutely required that she should be young and

interesting, and she carried her head moreover, even in the sacred

shade, with a discernible faith in herself, a kind of implied

conviction of consistency, security, impunity. But what had such a

woman come for if she hadn't come to pray? Strether's reading of

such matters was, it must be owned, confused; but he wondered if

her attitude were some congruous fruit of absolution, of

"indulgence." He knew but dimly what indulgence, in such a place,

might mean; yet he had, as with a soft sweep, a vision of how it

might indeed add to the zest of active rites. All this was a good

deal to have been denoted by a mere lurking figure who was nothing

to him; but, the last thing before leaving the church, he had the

surprise of a still deeper quickening.

He had dropped upon a seat halfway down the nave and, again in the

museum mood, was trying with head thrown back and eyes aloft,

to reconstitute a past, to reduce it in fact to the convenient terms

of Victor Hugo, whom, a few days before, giving the rein for once

in a way to the joy of life, he had purchased in seventy bound volumes,

a miracle of cheapness, parted with, he was assured by the shopman,

at the price of the red-and-gold alone. He looked, doubtless, while he

played his eternal nippers over Gothic glooms, sufficiently rapt in

reverence; but what his thought had finally bumped against was the

question of where, among packed accumulations, so multiform a wedge

would be able to enter. Were seventy volumes in red-and-gold to be

perhaps what he should most substantially have to show at Woollett

as the fruit of his mission? It was a possibility that held him a

minute--held him till he happened to feel that some one, unnoticed,

had approached him and paused. Turning, he saw that a lady stood

there as for a greeting, and he sprang up as he next took her,

securely, for Madame de Vionnet, who appeared to have recognised

him as she passed near him on her way to the door. She checked,

quickly and gaily, a certain confusion in him, came to meet it,

turned it back, by an art of her own; the confusion having

threatened him as he knew her for the person he had lately been

observing. She was the lurking figure of the dim chapel; she had

occupied him more than she guessed; but it came to him in time,

luckily, that he needn't tell her and that no harm, after all, had

been done. She herself, for that matter, straightway showing she

felt their encounter as the happiest of accidents, had for him a

"You come here too?" that despoiled surprise of every awkwardness.

"I come often," she said. "I love this place, but I'm terrible, in

general, for churches. The old women who live in them all know me;

in fact I'm already myself one of the old women. It's like that, at

all events, that I foresee I shall end." Looking about for a chair,

so that he instantly pulled one nearer, she sat down with him again

to the sound of an "Oh, I like so much your also being fond--!"

He confessed the extent of his feeling, though she left the object

vague; and he was struck with the tact, the taste of her vagueness,

which simply took for granted in him a sense of beautiful things.

He was conscious of how much it was affected, this sense, by

something subdued and discreet in the way she had arranged herself

for her special object and her morning walk--he believed her to

have come on foot; the way her slightly thicker veil was drawn--a

mere touch, but everything; the composed gravity of her dress, in

which, here and there, a dull wine-colour seemed to gleam faintly

through black; the charming discretion of her small compact head;

the quiet note, as she sat, of her folded, grey-gloved hands. It

was, to Strether's mind, as if she sat on her own ground, the light

honours of which, at an open gate, she thus easily did him, while

all the vastness and mystery of the domain stretched off behind.

When people were so completely in possession they could be

extraordinarily civil; and our friend had indeed at this hour a

kind of revelation of her heritage. She was romantic for him far

beyond what she could have guessed, and again he found his small

comfort in the conviction that, subtle though she was, his

impression must remain a secret from her. The thing that, once

more, made him uneasy for secrets in general was this particular

patience she could have with his own want of colour; albeit that on

the other hand his uneasiness pretty well dropped after he had been

for ten minutes as colourless as possible and at the same time as

responsive.

The moments had already, for that matter, drawn their deepest tinge

from the special interest excited in him by his vision of his

companion's identity with the person whose attitude before the

glimmering altar had so impressed him. This attitude fitted

admirably into the stand he had privately taken about her connexion

with Chad on the last occasion of his seeing them together. It

helped him to stick fast at the point he had then reached; it was

there he had resolved that he WOULD stick, and at no moment since

had it seemed as easy to do so. Unassailably innocent was a

relation that could make one of the parties to it so carry herself.

If it wasn't innocent why did she haunt the churches?--into which,

given the woman he could believe he made out, she would never have

come to flaunt an insolence of guilt. She haunted them for

continued help, for strength, for peace--sublime support which, if

one were able to look at it so, she found from day to day. They

talked, in low easy tones and with lifted lingering looks, about

the great monument and its history and its beauty--all of which,

Madame de Vionnet professed, came to her most in the other, the

outer view. "We'll presently, after we go," she said, "walk round

it again if you like. I'm not in a particular hurry, and it will be

pleasant to look at it well with you." He had spoken of the great

romancer and the great romance, and of what, to his imagination,

they had done for the whole, mentioning to her moreover the

exorbitance of his purchase, the seventy blazing volumes that were

so out of proportion.

"Out of proportion to what?"

"Well, to any other plunge." Yet he felt even as he spoke how at

that instant he was plunging. He had made up his mind and was

impatient to get into the air; for his purpose was a purpose to be

uttered outside, and he had a fear that it might with delay still

slip away from him. She however took her time; she drew out their

quiet gossip as if she had wished to profit by their meeting, and

this confirmed precisely an interpretation of her manner, of her

mystery. While she rose, as he would have called it, to the

question of Victor Hugo, her voice itself, the light low quaver of

her deference to the solemnity about them, seemed to make her words

mean something that they didn't mean openly. Help, strength, peace,

a sublime support--she hadn't found so much of these things as that

the amount wouldn't be sensibly greater for any scrap his

appearance of faith in her might enable her to feel in her hand.

Every little, in a long strain, helped, and if he happened to

affect her as a firm object she could hold on by, he wouldn't jerk

himself out of her reach. People in difficulties held on by what

was nearest, and he was perhaps after all not further off than

sources of comfort more abstract. It was as to this he had made up

his mind; he had made it up, that is, to give her a sign. The sign

would be that--though it was her own affair--he understood; the

sign would be that--though it was her own affair--she was free to

clutch. Since she took him for a firm object--much as he might to

his own sense appear at times to rock--he would do his best to BE one.

The end of it was that half an hour later they were seated together

for an early luncheon at a wonderful, a delightful house of

entertainment on the left bank--a place of pilgrimage for the

knowing, they were both aware, the knowing who came, for its great

renown, the homage of restless days, from the other end of the

town. Strether had already been there three times--first with Miss

Gostrey, then with Chad, then with Chad again and with Waymarsh and

little Bilham, all of whom he had himself sagaciously entertained;

and his pleasure was deep now on learning that Madame de Vionnet

hadn't yet been initiated. When he had said as they strolled round

the church, by the river, acting at last on what, within, he had

made up his mind to, "Will you, if you have time, come to dejeuner

with me somewhere? For instance, if you know it, over there on the

other side, which is so easy a walk"--and then had named the

place; when he had done this she stopped short as for quick

intensity, and yet deep difficulty, of response. She took in the

proposal as if it were almost too charming to be true; and there

had perhaps never yet been for her companion so unexpected a moment

of pride--so fine, so odd a case, at any rate, as his finding

himself thus able to offer to a person in such universal possession

a new, a rare amusement. She had heard of the happy spot, but she

asked him in reply to a further question how in the world he could

suppose her to have been there. He supposed himself to have

supposed that Chad might have taken her, and she guessed this the

next moment to his no small discomfort.

"Ah, let me explain," she smiled, "that I don't go about with him

in public; I never have such chances--not having them otherwise--

and it's just the sort of thing that, as a quiet creature living in

my hole, I adore." It was more than kind of him to have thought of

it--though, frankly, if he asked whether she had time she hadn't a

single minute. That however made no difference--she'd throw

everything over. Every duty at home, domestic, maternal, social,

awaited her; but it was a case for a high line. Her affairs would

go to smash, but hadn't one a right to one's snatch of scandal when

one was prepared to pay? It was on this pleasant basis of costly

disorder, consequently, that they eventually seated themselves, on

either side of a small table, at a window adjusted to the busy quay

and the shining barge-burdened Seine; where, for an hour, in the

matter of letting himself go, of diving deep, Strether was to feel

he had touched bottom. He was to feel many things on this occasion,

and one of the first of them was that he had travelled far since

that evening in London, before the theatre, when his dinner with

Maria Gostrey, between the pink-shaded candles, had struck him as

requiring so many explanations. He had at that time gathered them

in, the explanations--he had stored them up; but it was at present

as if he had either soared above or sunk below them--he couldn't

tell which; he could somehow think of none that didn't seem to

leave the appearance of collapse and cynicism easier for him than

lucidity. How could he wish it to be lucid for others, for any one,

that he, for the hour, saw reasons enough in the mere way the

bright clean ordered water-side life came in at the open window?--

the mere way Madame de Vionnet, opposite him over their intensely

white table-linen, their omelette aux tomates, their bottle of

straw-coloured Chablis, thanked him for everything almost with the

smile of a child, while her grey eyes moved in and out of their

talk, back to the quarter of the warm spring air, in which early

summer had already begun to throb, and then back again to his face

and their human questions.

Their human questions became many before they had done--many more,

as one after the other came up, than our friend's free fancy had at

all foreseen. The sense he had had before, the sense he had had

repeatedly, the sense that the situation was running away with him,

had never been so sharp as now; and all the more that he could

perfectly put his finger on the moment it had taken the bit in its

teeth. That accident had definitely occurred, the other evening,

after Chad's dinner; it had occurred, as he fully knew, at the

moment when he interposed between this lady and her child, when he

suffered himself so to discuss with her a matter closely concerning

them that her own subtlety, marked by its significant "Thank you!"

instantly sealed the occasion in her favour. Again he had held off

for ten days, but the situation had continued out of hand in spite

of that; the fact that it was running so fast being indeed just WHY

he had held off. What had come over him as he recognised her in the

nave of the church was that holding off could be but a losing game

from the instant she was worked for not only by her subtlety, but

by the hand of fate itself. If all the accidents were to fight on

her side--and by the actual showing they loomed large--he could

only give himself up. This was what he had done in privately

deciding then and there to propose she should breakfast with him.

What did the success of his proposal in fact resemble but the smash

in which a regular runaway properly ends? The smash was their walk,

their dejeuner, their omelette, the Chablis, the place, the view,

their present talk and his present pleasure in it--to say nothing,

wonder of wonders, of her own. To this tune and nothing less,

accordingly, was his surrender made good. It sufficiently lighted

up at least the folly of holding off. Ancient proverbs sounded, for

his memory, in the tone of their words and the clink of their

glasses, in the hum of the town and the plash of the river. It WAS

clearly better to suffer as a sheep than as a lamb. One might as

well perish by the sword as by famine.

"Maria's still away?"--that was the first thing she had asked him;

and when he had found the frankness to be cheerful about it in

spite of the meaning he knew her to attach to Miss Gostrey's

absence, she had gone on to enquire if he didn't tremendously miss

her. There were reasons that made him by no means sure, yet he

nevertheless answered "Tremendously"; which she took in as if it

were all she had wished to prove. Then, "A man in trouble MUST be

possessed somehow of a woman," she said; "if she doesn't come in

one way she comes in another."

"Why do you call me a man in trouble?"

"Ah because that's the way you strike me." She spoke ever so gently

and as if with all fear of wounding him while she sat partaking of

his bounty. "AREn't you in trouble?"

He felt himself colour at the question, and then hated that--hated

to pass for anything so idiotic as woundable. Woundable by Chad's

lady, in respect to whom he had come out with such a fund of

indifference--was he already at that point? Perversely, none the

less, his pause gave a strange air of truth to her supposition; and

what was he in fact but disconcerted at having struck her just in

the way he had most dreamed of not doing? "I'm not in trouble yet,"

he at last smiled. "I'm not in trouble now."

"Well, I'm always so. But that you sufficiently know." She was a

woman who, between courses, could be graceful with her elbows

on the table. It was a posture unknown to Mrs. Newsome, but it was

easy for a femme du monde. "Yes--I am 'now'!"

"There was a question you put to me," he presently returned, "the

night of Chad's dinner. I didn't answer it then, and it has been

very handsome of you not to have sought an occasion for pressing me

about it since."

She was instantly all there. "Of course I know what you allude to.

I asked you what you had meant by saying, the day you came to see

me, just before you left me, that you'd save me. And you then said

--at our friend's--that you'd have really to wait to see, for

yourself, what you did mean."

"Yes, I asked for time," said Strether. "And it sounds now, as you

put it, like a very ridiculous speech."

"Oh!" she murmured--she was full of attenuation. But she had

another thought. "If it does sound ridiculous why do you deny that

you're in trouble?"

"Ah if I were," he replied, "it wouldn't be the trouble of fearing

ridicule. I don't fear it."

"What then do you?"

"Nothing--now." And he leaned back in his chair.

"I like your 'now'!" she laughed across at him.

"Well, it's precisely that it fully comes to me at present that

I've kept you long enough. I know by this time, at any rate, what I

meant by my speech; and I really knew it the night of Chad's

dinner."

"Then why didn't you tell me?"

"Because it was difficult at the moment. I had already at that

moment done something for you, in the sense of what I had said the

day I went to see you; but I wasn't then sure of the importance I

might represent this as having."

She was all eagerness. "And you're sure now?"

"Yes; I see that, practically, I've done for you--had done for you

when you put me your question--all that it's as yet possible to me

to do. I feel now," he went on, "that it may go further than I

thought. What I did after my visit to you," he explained, "was to

write straight off to Mrs. Newsome about you, and I'm at last, from

one day to the other, expecting her answer. It's this answer that

will represent, as I believe, the consequences."

Patient and beautiful was her interest. "I see--the consequences of

your speaking for me." And she waited as if not to hustle him.

He acknowledged it by immediately going on. "The question, you

understand, was HOW I should save you. Well, I'm trying it by thus

letting her know that I consider you worth saving."

"I see--I see." Her eagerness broke through.

"How can I thank you enough?" He couldn't tell her that, however,

and she quickly pursued. "You do really, for yourself, consider

it?"

His only answer at first was to help her to the dish that had been

freshly put before them. "I've written to her again since then--

I've left her in no doubt of what I think. I've told her all about

you."

"Thanks--not so much. 'All about' me," she went on--"yes."

"All it seems to me you've done for him."

"Ah and you might have added all it seems to ME!" She laughed

again, while she took up her knife and fork, as in the cheer of

these assurances. "But you're not sure how she'll take it."

"No, I'll not pretend I'm sure."

"Voila." And she waited a moment. "I wish you'd tell me about her."

"Oh," said Strether with a slightly strained smile, "all that

need concern you about her is that she's really a grand person."

Madame de Vionnet seemed to demur. "Is that all that need concern

me about her?"

But Strether neglected the question. "Hasn't Chad talked to you?"

"Of his mother? Yes, a great deal--immensely. But not from your

point of view."

"He can't," our friend returned, "have said any ill of her."

"Not the least bit. He has given me, like you, the assurance that

she's really grand. But her being really grand is somehow just what

hasn't seemed to simplify our case. Nothing," she continued, "is

further from me than to wish to say a word against her; but of

course I feel how little she can like being told of her owing me

anything. No woman ever enjoys such an obligation to another

woman."

This was a proposition Strether couldn't contradict. "And yet what

other way could I have expressed to her what I felt? It's what

there was most to say about you."

"Do you mean then that she WILL be good to me?"

"It's what I'm waiting to see. But I've little doubt she would," he

added, "if she could comfortably see you."

It seemed to strike her as a happy, a beneficent thought. "Oh then

couldn't that be managed? Wouldn't she come out? Wouldn't she if

you so put it to her? DID you by any possibility?" she faintly

quavered.

"Oh no"--he was prompt. "Not that. It would be, much more, to give

an account of you that--since there's no question of YOUR paying

the visit--I should go home first."

It instantly made her graver. "And are you thinking of that?"

"Oh all the while, naturally."

"Stay with us--stay with us!" she exclaimed on this. "That's your

only way to make sure."

"To make sure of what?"

"Why that he doesn't break up. You didn't come out to do that to

him."

"Doesn't it depend," Strether returned after a moment, "on what you

mean by breaking up?"

"Oh you know well enough what I mean!"

His silence seemed again for a little to denote an understanding.

"You take for granted remarkable things."

"Yes, I do--to the extent that I don't take for granted vulgar

ones. You're perfectly capable of seeing that what you came out for

wasn't really at all to do what you'd now have to do."

"Ah it's perfectly simple," Strether good-humouredly pleaded. "I've

had but one thing to do--to put our case before him. To put it as

it could only be put here on the spot--by personal pressure. My

dear lady," he lucidly pursued, "my work, you see, is really done,

and my reasons for staying on even another day are none of the

best. Chad's in possession of our case and professes to do it full

justice. What remains is with himself. I've had my rest, my

amusement and refreshment; I've had, as we say at Woollett, a

lovely time. Nothing in it has been more lovely than this happy

meeting with you--in these fantastic conditions to which you've so

delightfully consented. I've a sense of success. It's what I

wanted. My getting all this good is what Chad has waited for, and I

gather that if I'm ready to go he's the same."

She shook her head with a finer deeper wisdom. "You're not ready.

If you're ready why did you write to Mrs. Newsome in the sense

you've mentioned to me?"

Strether considered. "I shan't go before I hear from her. You're

too much afraid of her," he added.

It produced between them a long look from which neither shrank. "I

don't think you believe that--believe I've not really reason to

fear her."

"She's capable of great generosity," Strether presently stated.

"Well then let her trust me a little. That's all I ask. Let her

recognise in spite of everything what I've done."

"Ah remember," our friend replied, "that she can't effectually

recognise it without seeing it for herself. Let Chad go over and

show her what you've done, and let him plead with her there for it

and, as it were, for YOU."

She measured the depth of this suggestion. "Do you give me your

word of honour that if she once has him there she won't do her best

to marry him?"

It made her companion, this enquiry, look again a while out at the

view; after which he spoke without sharpness. "When she sees for

herself what he is--"

But she had already broken in. "It's when she sees for herself what

he is that she'll want to marry him most."

Strether's attitude, that of due deference to what she said,

permitted him to attend for a minute to his luncheon. "I doubt if

that will come off. It won't be easy to make it."

"It will be easy if he remains there--and he'll remain for the

money. The money appears to be, as a probability, so hideously

much."

"Well," Strether presently concluded, "nothing COULD really hurt

you but his marrying."

She gave a strange light laugh. "Putting aside what may really hurt

HIM."

But her friend looked at her as if he had thought of that too.

"The question will come up, of course, of the future that you

yourself offer him."

She was leaning back now, but she fully faced him. "Well, let it

come up!"

"The point is that it's for Chad to make of it what he can. His

being proof against marriage will show what he does make."

"If he IS proof, yes"--she accepted the proposition. "But for

myself," she added, "the question is what YOU make."

"Ah I make nothing. It's not my affair."

"I beg your pardon. It's just there that, since you've taken it up

and are committed to it, it most intensely becomes yours. You're

not saving me, I take it, for your interest in myself, but for your

interest in our friend. The one's at any rate wholly dependent on

the other. You can't in honour not see me through," she wound up,

"because you can't in honour not see HIM."

Strange and beautiful to him was her quiet soft acuteness. The thing

that most moved him was really that she was so deeply serious. She had

none of the portentous forms of it, but he had never come in contact,

it struck him, with a force brought to so fine a head. Mrs. Newsome,

goodness knew, was serious; but it was nothing to this. He took it

all in, he saw it all together. "No," he mused, "I can't in honour

not see him."

Her face affected him as with an exquisite light. "You WILL then?"

"I will."

At this she pushed back her chair and was the next moment on her

feet. "Thank you!" she said with her hand held out to him across

the table and with no less a meaning in the words than her lips had

so particularly given them after Chad's dinner. The golden nail she

had then driven in pierced a good inch deeper. Yet he reflected

that he himself had only meanwhile done what he had made up his mind to

on the same occasion. So far as the essence of the matter went he had

simply stood fast on the spot on which he had then planted his feet.

II

He received three days after this a communication from America, in

the form of a scrap of blue paper folded and gummed, not reaching

him through his bankers, but delivered at his hotel by a small boy

in uniform, who, under instructions from the concierge, approached

him as he slowly paced the little court. It was the evening hour,

but daylight was long now and Paris more than ever penetrating. The

scent of flowers was in the streets, he had the whiff of violets

perpetually in his nose; and he had attached himself to sounds and

suggestions, vibrations of the air, human and dramatic, he

imagined, as they were not in other places, that came out for him

more and more as the mild afternoons deepened--a far-off hum, a

sharp near click on the asphalt, a voice calling, replying,

somewhere and as full of tone as an actor's in a play. He was to

dine at home, as usual, with Waymarsh--they had settled to that for

thrift and simplicity; and he now hung about before his friend came

down.

He read his telegram in the court, standing still a long time where

he had opened it and giving five minutes afterwards to the renewed

study of it. At last, quickly, he crumpled it up as if to get it

out of the way; in spite of which, however, he kept it there--

still kept it when, at the end of another turn, he had dropped into

a chair placed near a small table. Here, with his scrap of paper

compressed in his fist and further concealed by his folding his

arms tight, he sat for some time in thought, gazed before him so

straight that Waymarsh appeared and approached him without catching

his eye. The latter in fact, struck with his appearance, looked at

him hard for a single instant and then, as if determined to that

course by some special vividness in it, dropped back into the salon

de lecture without addressing him. But the pilgrim from Milrose

permitted himself still to observe the scene from behind the clear

glass plate of that retreat. Strether ended, as he sat, by a fresh

scrutiny of his compressed missive, which he smoothed out carefully

again as he placed it on his table. There it remained for some

minutes, until, at last looking up, he saw Waymarsh watching him

from within. It was on this that their eyes met--met for a moment

during which neither moved. But Strether then got up, folding his

telegram more carefully and putting it into his waistcoat pocket

A few minutes later the friends were seated together at dinner; but

Strether had meanwhile said nothing about it, and they eventually

parted, after coffee in the court, with nothing said on either

side. Our friend had moreover the consciousness that even less than

usual was on this occasion said between them, so that it was almost

as if each had been waiting for something from the other. Waymarsh

had always more or less the air of sitting at the door of his tent,

and silence, after so many weeks, had come to play its part in

their concert. This note indeed, to Strether's sense, had lately

taken a fuller tone, and it was his fancy to-night that they had

never quite so drawn it out. Yet it befell, none the less that he

closed the door to confidence when his companion finally asked him

if there were anything particular the matter with him. "Nothing,"

he replied, "more than usual."

On the morrow, however, at an early hour, he found occasion to give

an answer more in consonance with the facts. What was the matter

had continued to be so all the previous evening, the first hours of

which, after dinner, in his room, he had devoted to the copious

composition of a letter. He had quitted Waymarsh for this purpose,

leaving him to his own resources with less ceremony than their

wont, but finally coming down again with his letter unconcluded and

going forth into the streets without enquiry for his comrade. He

had taken a long vague walk, and one o'clock had struck before his

return and his re-ascent to his room by the aid of the glimmering

candle-end left for him on the shelf outside the porter's lodge. He

had possessed himself, on closing his door, of the numerous loose

sheets of his unfinished composition, and then, without reading

them over, had torn them into small pieces. He had thereupon slept--

as if it had been in some measure thanks to that sacrifice--the

sleep of the just, and had prolonged his rest considerably beyond

his custom. Thus it was that when, between nine and ten, the tap of

the knob of a walking-stick sounded on his door, he had not yet

made himself altogether presentable. Chad Newsome's bright deep

voice determined quickly enough none the less the admission of the

visitor. The little blue paper of the evening before, plainly an

object the more precious for its escape from premature destruction,

now lay on the sill of the open window, smoothed out afresh and

kept from blowing away by the superincumbent weight of his watch.

Chad, looking about with careless and competent criticism, as he

looked wherever he went immediately espied it and permitted himself

to fix it for a moment rather hard. After which he turned his eyes

to his host. "It has come then at last?"

Strether paused in the act of pinning his necktie. "Then you know--?

You've had one too?"

"No, I've had nothing, and I only know what I see. I see that thing

and I guess. Well," he added, "it comes as pat as in a play, for

I've precisely turned up this morning--as I would have done

yesterday, but it was impossible--to take you."

"To take me?" Strether had turned again to his glass.

"Back, at last, as I promised. I'm ready--I've really been ready

this month. I've only been waiting for you--as was perfectly right.

But you're better now; you're safe--I see that for myself; you've

got all your good. You're looking, this morning, as fit as a flea."

Strether, at his glass, finished dressing; consulting that witness

moreover on this last opinion. WAS he looking preternaturally fit?

There was something in it perhaps for Chad's wonderful eye, but he

had felt himself for hours rather in pieces. Such a judgement,

however, was after all but a contribution to his resolve; it

testified unwittingly to his wisdom. He was still firmer,

apparently--since it shone in him as a light--than he had flattered

himself. His firmness indeed was slightly compromised, as he faced

about to his friend, by the way this very personage looked--though

the case would of course have been worse hadn't the secret of

personal magnificence been at every hour Chad's unfailing

possession. There he was in all the pleasant morning freshness of

it--strong and sleek and gay, easy and fragrant and fathomless,

with happy health in his colour, and pleasant silver in his thick

young hair, and the right word for everything on the lips that his

clear brownness caused to show as red. He had never struck Strether

as personally such a success; it was as if now, for his definite

surrender, he had gathered himself vividly together. This, sharply

and rather strangely, was the form in which he was to be presented

to Woollett. Our friend took him in again--he was always taking him

in and yet finding that parts of him still remained out; though

even thus his image showed through a mist of other things. "I've

had a cable," Strether said, "from your mother."

"I dare say, my dear man. I hope she's well."

Strether hesitated. "No--she's not well, I'm sorry to have to tell

you."

"Ah," said Chad, "I must have had the instinct of it. All the more

reason then that we should start straight off."

Strether had now got together hat, gloves and stick, but Chad had

dropped on the sofa as if to show where he wished to make his

point. He kept observing his companion's things; he might have been

judging how quickly they could be packed. He might even have wished

to hint that he'd send his own servant to assist. "What do you

mean," Strether enquired, "by 'straight off'?"

"Oh by one of next week's boats. Everything at this season goes out

so light that berths will be easy anywhere."

Strether had in his hand his telegram, which he had kept there

after attaching his watch, and he now offered it to Chad, who,

however, with an odd movement, declined to take it. "Thanks, I'd

rather not. Your correspondence with Mother's your own affair. I'm

only WITH you both on it, whatever it is." Strether, at this, while

their eyes met, slowly folded the missive and put it in his pocket;

after which, before he had spoken again, Chad broke fresh ground.

"Has Miss Gostrey come back?"

But when Strether presently spoke it wasn't in answer. "It's not, I

gather, that your mother's physically ill; her health, on the

whole, this spring, seems to have been better than usual. But she's

worried, she's anxious, and it appears to have risen within the

last few days to a climax. We've tired out, between us, her

patience."

"Oh it isn't YOU!" Chad generously protested.

"I beg your pardon--it IS me." Strether was mild and melancholy,

but firm. He saw it far away and over his companion's head. "It's

very particularly me."

"Well then all the more reason. Marchons, marchons!" said the young

man gaily. His host, however, at this, but continued to stand

agaze; and he had the next thing repeated his question of a moment

before. "Has Miss Gostrey come back?"

"Yes, two days ago."

"Then you've seen her?"

"No--I'm to see her to-day." But Strether wouldn't linger now on

Miss Gostrey. "Your mother sends me an ultimatum. If I can't bring

you I'm to leave you; I'm to come at any rate myself."

"Ah but you CAN bring me now," Chad, from his sofa, reassuringly

replied.

Strether had a pause. "I don't think I understand you. Why was it

that, more than a month ago, you put it to me so urgently to let

Madame de Vionnet speak for you?"

"'Why'?" Chad considered, but he had it at his fingers' ends. "Why

but because I knew how well she'd do it? It was the way to keep you

quiet and, to that extent, do you good. Besides," he happily and

comfortably explained, "I wanted you really to know her and to get

the impression of her--and you see the good that HAS done you."

"Well," said Strether, "the way she has spoken for you, all the

same--so far as I've given her a chance--has only made me feel how

much she wishes to keep you. If you make nothing of that I don't

see why you wanted me to listen to her."

"Why my dear man," Chad exclaimed, "I make everything of it! How

can you doubt--?"

"I doubt only because you come to me this morning with your signal

to start."

Chad stared, then gave a laugh. "And isn't my signal to start just

what you've been waiting for?"

Strether debated; he took another turn. "This last month I've been

awaiting, I think, more than anything else, the message I have

here."

"You mean you've been afraid of it?"

"Well, I was doing my business in my own way. And I suppose your

present announcement," Strether went on, "isn't merely the result

of your sense of what I've expected. Otherwise you wouldn't have

put me in relation--" But he paused, pulling up.

At this Chad rose. "Ah HER wanting me not to go has nothing to do

with it! It's only because she's afraid--afraid of the way that,

over there, I may get caught. But her fear's groundless."

He had met again his companion's sufficiently searching look. "Are

you tired of her?"

Chad gave him in reply to this, with a movement of the head, the

strangest slow smile he had ever had from him. "Never."

It had immediately, on Strether's imagination, so deep and soft an

effect that our friend could only for the moment keep it before

him. "Never?"

"Never," Chad obligingly and serenely repeated.

It made his companion take several more steps. "Then YOU'RE not

afraid."

"Afraid to go?"

Strether pulled up again. "Afraid to stay."

The young man looked brightly amazed. "You want me now to 'stay'?"

"If I don't immediately sail the Pococks will immediately come out.

That's what I mean," said Strether, "by your mother's ultimatum ."

Chad showed a still livelier, but not an alarmed interest. "She has

turned on Sarah and Jim?"

Strether joined him for an instant in the vision. "Oh and you may

be sure Mamie. THAT'S whom she's turning on."

This also Chad saw--he laughed out. "Mamie--to corrupt me?"

"Ah," said Strether, "she's very charming."

"So you've already more than once told me. I should like to see

her."

Something happy and easy, something above all unconscious, in the

way he said this, brought home again to his companion the facility

of his attitude and the enviability of his state. "See her then by

all means. And consider too," Strether went on, "that you really

give your sister a lift in letting her come to you. You give her a

couple of months of Paris, which she hasn't seen, if I'm not

mistaken, since just after she was married, and which I'm sure she

wants but the pretext to visit."

Chad listened, but with all his own knowledge of the world. "She

has had it, the pretext, these several years, yet she has never

taken it."

"Do you mean YOU?" Strether after an instant enquired.

"Certainly--the lone exile. And whom do you mean?" said Chad.

"Oh I mean ME. I'm her pretext. That is--for it comes to the same

thing--I'm your mother's."

"Then why," Chad asked, "doesn't Mother come herself?"

His friend gave him a long look. "Should you like her to?" And as

he for the moment said nothing: "It's perfectly open to you to

cable for her."

Chad continued to think. "Will she come if I do?"

"Quite possibly. But try, and you'll see."

"Why don't YOU try?" Chad after a moment asked.

"Because I don't want to."

Chad thought. "Don't desire her presence here?"

Strether faced the question, and his answer was the more emphatic.

"Don't put it off, my dear boy, on ME!"

"Well--I see what you mean. I'm sure you'd behave beautifully but you

DON'T want to see her. So I won't play you that trick.'

"Ah," Strether declared, "I shouldn't call it a trick. You've a

perfect right, and it would be perfectly straight of you." Then he

added in a different tone: "You'd have moreover, in the person of

Madame de Vionnet, a very interesting relation prepared for her."

Their eyes, on this proposition, continued to meet, but Chad's

pleasant and bold, never flinched for a moment. He got up at last

and he said something with which Strether was struck. "She wouldn't

understand her, but that makes no difference. Madame de Vionnet

would like to see her. She'd like to be charming to her. She

believes she could work it."

Strether thought a moment, affected by this, but finally turning

away. "She couldn't!"

"You're quite sure?" Chad asked.

"Well, risk it if you like!"

Strether, who uttered this with serenity, had urged a plea for their

now getting into the air; but the young man still waited. "Have you

sent your answer?"

"No, I've done nothing yet."

"Were you waiting to see me?"

"No, not that."

"Only waiting"--and Chad, with this, had a smile for him--"to see

Miss Gostrey?"

"No--not even Miss Gostrey. I wasn't waiting to see any one. I had

only waited, till now, to make up my mind--in complete solitude;

and, since I of course absolutely owe you the information, was on

the point of going out with it quite made up. Have therefore a

little more patience with me. Remember," Strether went on, "that

that's what you originally asked ME to have. I've had it, you see,

and you see what has come of it. Stay on with me."

Chad looked grave. "How much longer?"

"Well, till I make you a sign. I can't myself, you know, at the

best, or at the worst, stay for ever. Let the Pococks come,"

Strether repeated.

"Because it gains you time?"

"Yes--it gains me time."

Chad, as if it still puzzled him, waited a minute. "You don't want

to get back to Mother?"

"Not just yet. I'm not ready."

"You feel," Chad asked in a tone of his own, "the charm of life

over here?"

"Immensely." Strether faced it. "You've helped me so to feel it

that that surely needn't surprise you."

"No, it doesn't surprise me, and I'm delighted. But what, my dear

man," Chad went on with conscious queerness, "does it all lead to

for you?"

The change of position and of relation, for each, was so oddly

betrayed in the question that Chad laughed out as soon as he had

uttered it--which made Strether also laugh. "Well, to my having a

certitude that has been tested--that has passed through the fire.

But oh," he couldn't help breaking out, "if within my first month

here you had been willing to move with me--!"

"Well?" said Chad, while he broke down as for weight of thought.

"Well, we should have been over there by now."

"Ah but you wouldn't have had your fun!"

"I should have had a month of it; and I'm having now, if you want

to know," Strether continued, "enough to last me for the rest of my

days."

Chad looked amused and interested, yet still somewhat in the dark;

partly perhaps because Strether's estimate of fun had required of

him from the first a good deal of elucidation. "It wouldn't do if

I left you--?"

"Left me?"--Strether remained blank.

"Only for a month or two--time to go and come. Madame de Vionnet,"

Chad smiled, "would look after you in the interval."

"To go back by yourself, I remaining here?" Again for an instant

their eyes had the question out; after which Strether said:

"Grotesque!"

"But I want to see Mother," Chad presently returned. "Remember how

long it is since I've seen Mother."

"Long indeed; and that's exactly why I was originally so keen for

moving you. Hadn't you shown us enough how beautifully you could do

without it?"

"Oh but," said Chad wonderfully, "I'm better now."

There was an easy triumph in it that made his friend laugh out

again. "Oh if you were worse I SHOULD know what to do with you. In

that case I believe I'd have you gagged and strapped down, carried

on board resisting, kicking. How MUCH," Strether asked, "do you

want to see Mother?"

"How much?"--Chad seemed to find it in fact difficult to say.

"How much."

"Why as much as you've made me. I'd give anything to see her. And

you've left me," Chad went on, "in little enough doubt as to how

much SHE wants it."

Strether thought a minute. "Well then if those things are really

your motive catch the French steamer and sail to-morrow. Of course,

when it comes to that, you're absolutely free to do as you choose.

From the moment you can't hold yourself I can only accept your

flight."

"I'll fly in a minute then," said Chad, "if you'll stay here."

"I'll stay here till the next steamer--then I'll follow you."

"And do you call that," Chad asked, "accepting my flight?"

"Certainly--it's the only thing to call it. The only way to keep me

here, accordingly," Strether explained, "is by staying yourself."

Chad took it in. "All the more that I've really dished you, eh?"

"Dished me?" Strether echoed as inexpressively as possible.

"Why if she sends out the Pococks it will be that she doesn't trust

you, and if she doesn't trust you, that bears upon--well, you know

what."

Strether decided after a moment that he did know what, and in

consonance with this he spoke. "You see then all the more what you

owe me."

"Well, if I do see, how can I pay?"

"By not deserting me. By standing by me."

"Oh I say--!" But Chad, as they went downstairs, clapped a firm

hand, in the manner of a pledge, upon his shoulder. They descended

slowly together and had, in the court of the hotel, some further

talk, of which the upshot was that they presently separated. Chad

Newsome departed, and Strether, left alone, looked about, superficially,

for Waymarsh. But Waymarsh hadn't yet, it appeared, come down, and

our friend finally went forth without sight of him.

III

At four o'clock that afternoon he had still not seen him, but he

was then, as to make up for this, engaged in talk about him with

Miss Gostrey. Strether had kept away from home all day, given

himself up to the town and to his thoughts, wandered and mused,

been at once restless and absorbed--and all with the present climax

of a rich little welcome in the Quartier Marboeuf. "Waymarsh has

been, 'unbeknown' to me, I'm convinced"--for Miss Gostrey had

enquired--"in communication with Woollett: the consequence of which

was, last night, the loudest possible call for me."

"Do you mean a letter to bring you home?"

"No--a cable, which I have at this moment in my pocket: a 'Come

back by the first ship.'"

Strether's hostess, it might have been made out, just escaped

changing colour. Reflexion arrived but in time and established a

provisional serenity. It was perhaps exactly this that enabled her

to say with duplicity: "And you're going--?"

"You almost deserve it when you abandon me so."

She shook her head as if this were not worth taking up. "My absence

has helped you--as I've only to look at you to see. It was my

calculation, and I'm justified. You're not where you were. And the

thing," she smiled, "was for me not to be there either. You can go

of yourself."

"Oh but I feel to-day," he comfortably declared, "that I shall want

you yet."

She took him all in again. "Well, I promise you not again to leave

you, but it will only be to follow you. You've got your momentum

and can toddle alone."

He intelligently accepted it. "Yes--I suppose I can toddle. It's

the sight of that in fact that has upset Waymarsh. He can bear it--

the way I strike him as going--no longer. That's only the climax

of his original feeling. He wants me to quit; and he must have

written to Woollett that I'm in peril of perdition."

"Ah good!" she murmured. "But is it only your supposition?"

"I make it out--it explains."

"Then he denies?--or you haven't asked him?"

"I've not had time," Strether said; "I made it out but last night,

putting various things together, and I've not been since then face

to face with him."

She wondered. "Because you're too disgusted? You can't trust

yourself?"

He settled his glasses on his nose. "Do I look in a great rage?"

"You look divine!"

"There's nothing," he went on, "to be angry about. He has done me

on the contrary a service."

She made it out. "By bringing things to a head?"

"How well you understand!" he almost groaned. "Waymarsh won't in

the least, at any rate, when I have it out with him, deny or

extenuate. He has acted from the deepest conviction, with the best

conscience and after wakeful nights. He'll recognise that he's

fully responsible, and will consider that he has been highly

successful; so that any discussion we may have will bring us quite

together again--bridge the dark stream that has kept us so

thoroughly apart. We shall have at last, in the consequences of his

act, something we can definitely talk about."

She was silent a little. "How wonderfully you take it! But you're

always wonderful."

He had a pause that matched her own; then he had, with an adequate

spirit, a complete admission. "It's quite true. I'm extremely

wonderful just now. I dare say in fact I'm quite fantastic, and I

shouldn't be at all surprised if I were mad."

"Then tell me!" she earnestly pressed. As he, however, for the time

answered nothing, only returning the look with which she watched

him, she presented herself where it was easier to meet her. "What

will Mr. Waymarsh exactly have done?"

"Simply have written a letter. One will have been quite enough. He

has told them I want looking after."

"And DO you?"--she was all interest.

"Immensely. And I shall get it."

"By which you mean you don't budge?"

"I don't budge."

"You've cabled?"

"No--I've made Chad do it."

"That you decline to come?"

"That HE declines. We had it out this morning and I brought him

round. He had come in, before I was down, to tell me he was ready--

ready, I mean, to return. And he went off, after ten minutes with

me, to say he wouldn't."

Miss Gostrey followed with intensity. "Then you've STOPPED him?"

Strether settled himself afresh in his chair. "I've stopped him.

That is for the time. That"--he gave it to her more vividly--"is

where I am."

"I see, I see. But where's Mr. Newsome? He was ready," she asked,

"to go?"

"All ready."

"And sincerely--believing YOU'D be?"

"Perfectly, I think; so that he was amazed to find the hand I had

laid on him to pull him over suddenly converted into an engine for

keeping him still."

It was an account of the matter Miss Gostrey could weigh. "Does he

think the conversion sudden?"

"Well," said Strether, "I'm not altogether sure what he thinks. I'm

not sure of anything that concerns him, except that the more I've

seen of him the less I've found him what I originally expected.

He's obscure, and that's why I'm waiting."

She wondered. "But for what in particular?"

"For the answer to his cable."

"And what was his cable?"

"I don't know," Strether replied; "it was to be, when he left me,

according to his own taste. I simply said to him: 'I want to stay,

and the only way for me to do so is for you to.' That I wanted to

stay seemed to interest him, and he acted on that."

Miss Gostrey turned it over. "He wants then himself to stay."

"He half wants it. That is he half wants to go. My original appeal

has to that extent worked in him. Nevertheless," Strether pursued,

"he won't go. Not, at least, so long as I'm here."

"But you can't," his companion suggested, "stay here always. I wish

you could."

"By no means. Still, I want to see him a little further. He's not

in the least the case I supposed, he's quite another case. And it's

as such that he interests me." It was almost as if for his own

intelligence that, deliberate and lucid, our friend thus expressed

the matter. "I don't want to give him up."

Miss Gostrey but desired to help his lucidity. She had however to

be light and tactful. "Up, you mean--a--to his mother?"

"Well, I'm not thinking of his mother now. I'm thinking of the plan

of which I was the mouthpiece, which, as soon as we met, I put

before him as persuasively as I knew how, and which was drawn up,

as it were, in complete ignorance of all that, in this last long

period, has been happening to him. It took no account whatever of

the impression I was here on the spot immediately to begin to

receive from him--impressions of which I feel sure I'm far from

having had the last."

Miss Gostrey had a smile of the most genial criticism. "So your

idea is--more or less--to stay out of curiosity?"

"Call it what you like! I don't care what it's called--"

"So long as you do stay? Certainly not then. I call it, all the

same, immense fun," Maria Gostrey declared; "and to see you work it

out will be one of the sensations of my life. It IS clear you can

toddle alone!"

He received this tribute without elation. "I shan't be alone when

the Pococks have come."

Her eyebrows went up. "The Pococks are coming?"

"That, I mean, is what will happen--and happen as quickly as

possible--in consequence of Chad's cable. They'll simply embark.

Sarah will come to speak for her mother--with an effect different

from MY muddle."

Miss Gostrey more gravely wondered. "SHE then will take him back?"

"Very possibly--and we shall see. She must at any rate have the

chance, and she may be trusted to do all she can."

"And do you WANT that?"

"Of course," said Strether, "I want it. I want to play fair "

But she had lost for a moment the thread. "If it devolves on the

Pococks why do you stay?"

"Just to see that I DO play fair--and a little also, no doubt, that

they do." Strether was luminous as he had never been. "I came out

to find myself in presence of new facts--facts that have kept

striking me as less and less met by our old reasons. The matter's

perfectly simple. New reasons--reasons as new as the facts

themselves--are wanted; and of this our friends at Woollett--Chad's

and mine--were at the earliest moment definitely notified. If any

are producible Mrs. Pocock will produce them; she'll bring over the

whole collection. They'll be," he added with a pensive smile "a

part of the 'fun' you speak of."

She was quite in the current now and floating by his side. "It's

Mamie--so far as I've had it from you--who'll be their great card."

And then as his contemplative silence wasn't a denial she

significantly added: "I think I'm sorry for her."

"I think I am!"--and Strether sprang up, moving about a little as

her eyes followed him. "But it can't be helped."

"You mean her coming out can't be?"

He explained after another turn what he meant. "The only way for

her not to come is for me to go home--as I believe that on the spot

I could prevent it. But the difficulty as to that is that if I do

go home--"

"I see, I see"--she had easily understood. "Mr. Newsome will do the

same, and that's not"--she laughed out now--"to be thought of."

Strether had no laugh; he had only a quiet comparatively placid

look that might have shown him as proof against ridicule. "Strange,

isn't it?"

They had, in the matter that so much interested them, come so far

as this without sounding another name--to which however their

present momentary silence was full of a conscious reference.

Strether's question was a sufficient implication of the weight it

had gained with him during the absence of his hostess; and just for

that reason a single gesture from her could pass for him as a vivid

answer. Yet he was answered still better when she said in a moment:

"Will Mr. Newsome introduce his sister--?"

"To Madame de Vionnet?" Strether spoke the name at last. "I shall

be greatly surprised if he doesn't."

She seemed to gaze at the possibility. "You mean you've thought of

it and you're prepared."

"I've thought of it and I'm prepared."

It was to her visitor now that she applied her consideration. "Bon!

You ARE magnificent!"

"Well," he answered after a pause and a little wearily, but still

standing there before her--"well, that's what, just once in all my

dull days, I think I shall like to have been!"

Two days later he had news from Chad of a communication from

Woollett in response to their determinant telegram, this missive

being addressed to Chad himself and announcing the immediate

departure for France of Sarah and Jim and Mamie. Strether had

meanwhile on his own side cabled; he had but delayed that act till

after his visit to Miss Gostrey, an interview by which, as so often

before, he felt his sense of things cleared up and settled. His

message to Mrs. Newsome, in answer to her own, had consisted of the

words: "Judge best to take another month, but with full

appreciation of all re-enforcements." He had added that he was

writing, but he was of course always writing; it was a practice

that continued, oddly enough, to relieve him, to make him come

nearer than anything else to the consciousness of doing something:

so that he often wondered if he hadn't really, under his recent

stress, acquired some hollow trick, one of the specious arts of

make-believe. Wouldn't the pages he still so freely dispatched by

the American post have been worthy of a showy journalist, some

master of the great new science of beating the sense out of words?

Wasn't he writing against time, and mainly to show he was kind?--

since it had become quite his habit not to like to read himself

over. On those lines he could still be liberal, yet it was at best

a sort of whistling in the dark. It was unmistakeable moreover that

the sense of being in the dark now pressed on him more sharply--

creating thereby the need for a louder and livelier whistle. He

whistled long and hard after sending his message; he whistled again

and again in celebration of Chad's news; there was an interval of a

fortnight in which this exercise helped him. He had no great notion

of what, on the spot, Sarah Pocock would have to say, though he had

indeed confused premonitions; but it shouldn't be in her power to

say--it shouldn't be in any one's anywhere to say--that he was

neglecting her mother. He might have written before more freely,

but he had never written more copiously; and he frankly gave for a

reason at Woollett that he wished to fill the void created there by

Sarah's departure.

The increase of his darkness, however, and the quickening, as I

have called it, of his tune, resided in the fact that he was

hearing almost nothing. He had for some time been aware that he was

hearing less than before, and he was now clearly following a

process by which Mrs. Newsome's letters could but logically stop.

He hadn't had a line for many days, and he needed no proof--though

he was, in time, to have plenty--that she wouldn't have put pen to

paper after receiving the hint that had determined her telegram.

She wouldn't write till Sarah should have seen him and reported on

him. It was strange, though it might well be less so than his own

behaviour appeared at Woollett. It was at any rate significant, and

what WAS remarkable was the way his friend's nature and manner put

on for him, through this very drop of demonstration, a greater

intensity. It struck him really that he had never so lived with her

as during this period of her silence; the silence was a sacred

hush, a finer clearer medium, in which her idiosyncrasies showed.

He walked about with her, sat with her, drove with her and dined

face-to-face with her--a rare treat "in his life," as he could

perhaps have scarce escaped phrasing it; and if he had never seen

her so soundless he had never, on the other hand, felt her so

highly, so almost austerely, herself: pure and by the vulgar

estimate "cold," but deep devoted delicate sensitive noble. Her

vividness in these respects became for him, in the special

conditions, almost an obsession; and though the obsession sharpened

his pulses, adding really to the excitement of life, there were

hours at which, to be less on the stretch, he directly sought

forgetfulness. He knew it for the queerest of adventures--a

circumstance capable of playing such a part only for Lambert

Strether--that in Paris itself, of all places, he should find this

ghost of the lady of Woollett more importunate than any other

presence.

When he went back to Maria Gostrey it was for the change to

something else. And yet after all the change scarcely operated for

he talked to her of Mrs. Newsome in these days as he had never

talked before. He had hitherto observed in that particular a

discretion and a law; considerations that at present broke down

quite as if relations had altered. They hadn't REALLY altered, he

said to himself, so much as that came to; for if what had occurred

was of course that Mrs. Newsome had ceased to trust him, there was

nothing on the other hand to prove that he shouldn't win back her

confidence. It was quite his present theory that he would leave no

stone unturned to do so; and in fact if he now told Maria things

about her that he had never told before this was largely because it

kept before him the idea of the honour of such a woman's esteem.

His relation with Maria as well was, strangely enough, no longer

quite the same; this truth--though not too disconcertingly--had

come up between them on the renewal of their meetings. It was all

contained in what she had then almost immediately said to him; it

was represented by the remark she had needed but ten minutes to

make and that he hadn't been disposed to gainsay. He could toddle

alone, and the difference that showed was extraordinary. The turn

taken by their talk had promptly confirmed this difference; his

larger confidence on the score of Mrs. Newsome did the rest; and

the time seemed already far off when he had held out his small

thirsty cup to the spout of her pail. Her pail was scarce touched

now, and other fountains had flowed for him; she fell into her

place as but one of his tributaries; and there was a strange

sweetness--a melancholy mildness that touched him--in her

acceptance of the altered order.

It marked for himself the flight of time, or at any rate what he

was pleased to think of with irony and pity as the rush of experience;

it having been but the day before yesterday that he sat at her feet

and held on by her garment and was fed by her hand. It was the

proportions that were changed, and the proportions were at all

times, he philosophised, the very conditions of perception, the

terms of thought. It was as if, with her effective little entresol and

and her wide acquaintance, her activities, varieties, promiscuities,

the duties and devotions that took up nine tenths of her time and

of which he got, guardedly, but the side-wind--it was as if she had

shrunk to a secondary element and had consented to the shrinkage

with the perfection of tact. This perfection had never failed

her; it had originally been greater than his prime measure for it;

it had kept him quite apart, kept him out of the shop, as she

called her huge general acquaintance, made their commerce as

quiet, as much a thing of the home alone--the opposite of the

shop--as if she had never another customer. She had been wonderful

to him at first, with the memory of her little entresol, the image

to which, on most mornings at that time, his eyes directly opened;

but now she mainly figured for him as but part of the bristling

total--though of course always as a person to whom he should never

cease to be indebted. It would never be given to him certainly

to inspire a greater kindness. She had decked him out for others,

and he saw at this point at least nothing she would ever ask for.

She only wondered and questioned and listened, rendering him the

homage of a wistful speculation. She expressed it repeatedly;

he was already far beyond her, and she must prepare herself to

lose him. There was but one little chance for her.

Often as she had said it he met it--for it was a touch he liked--

each time the same way. "My coming to grief?"

"Yes--then I might patch you up."

"Oh for my real smash, if it takes place, there will be no

patching."

"But you surely don't mean it will kill you."

"No--worse. It will make me old."

"Ah nothing can do that! The wonderful and special thing about you

is that you ARE, at this time of day, youth." Then she always made,

further, one of those remarks that she had completely ceased to

adorn with hesitations or apologies, and that had, by the same

token, in spite of their extreme straightness, ceased to produce in

Strether the least embarrassment. She made him believe them, and

they became thereby as impersonal as truth itself. "It's just your

particular charm."

His answer too was always the same. "Of course I'm youth--youth

for the trip to Europe. I began to be young, or at least to get the

benefit of it, the moment I met you at Chester, and that's what has

been taking place ever since. I never had the benefit at the proper

time--which comes to saying that I never had the thing itself. I'm

having the benefit at this moment; I had it the other day when I

said to Chad 'Wait'; I shall have it still again when Sarah Pocock

arrives. It's a benefit that would make a poor show for many

people; and I don't know who else but you and I, frankly, could

begin to see in it what I feel. I don't get drunk; I don't pursue

the ladies; I don't spend money; I don't even write sonnets. But

nevertheless I'm making up late for what I didn't have early. I

cultivate my little benefit in my own little way. It amuses me more

than anything that has happened to me in all my life. They may say

what they like--it's my surrender, it's my tribute, to youth. One

puts that in where one can--it has to come in somewhere, if only

out of the lives, the conditions, the feelings of other persons.

Chad gives me the sense of it, for all his grey hairs, which merely

make it solid in him and safe and serene; and SHE does the same,

for all her being older than he, for all her marriageable daughter,

her separated husband, her agitated history. Though they're young

enough, my pair, I don't say they're, in the freshest way, their

own absolutely prime adolescence; for that has nothing to do with

it. The point is that they're mine. Yes, they're my youth; since

somehow at the right time nothing else ever was. What I meant just

now therefore is that it would all go--go before doing its work--

if they were to fail me."

On which, just here, Miss Gostrey inveterately questioned. "What do

you, in particular, call its work?"

"Well, to see me through."

"But through what?"--she liked to get it all out of him.

"Why through this experience." That was all that would come.

It regularly gave her none the less the last word. "Don't you

remember how in those first days of our meeting it was I who was to

see you through?"

"Remember? Tenderly, deeply"--he always rose to it. "You're just

doing your part in letting me maunder to you thus."

"Ah don't speak as if my part were small; since whatever else fails

you--"

"YOU won't, ever, ever, ever?"--he thus took her up. "Oh I beg your

pardon; you necessarily, you inevitably WILL. Your conditions--that's

what I mean--won't allow me anything to do for you."

"Let alone--I see what you mean--that I'm drearily dreadfully old.

I AM, but there's a service--possible for you to render--that I know,

all the same, I shall think of."

"And what will it be?"

This, in fine, however, she would never tell him. "You shall hear

only if your smash takes place. As that's really out of the

question, I won't expose myself''--a point at which, for reasons of

his own, Strether ceased to press.

He came round, for publicity--it was the easiest thing--to the idea

that his smash WAS out of the question, and this rendered idle the

discussion of what might follow it. He attached an added

importance, as the days elapsed, to the arrival of the Pococks; he

had even a shameful sense of waiting for it insincerely and

incorrectly. He accused himself of making believe to his own mind

that Sarah's presence, her impression, her judgement would simplify

and harmonise, he accused himself of being so afraid of what they

MIGHT do that he sought refuge, to beg the whole question, in a

vain fury. He had abundantly seen at home what they were in the

habit of doing, and he had not at present the smallest ground. His

clearest vision was when he made out that what he most desired was

an account more full and free of Mrs. Newsome's state of mind than

any he felt he could now expect from herself; that calculation at

least went hand in hand with the sharp consciousness of wishing to

prove to himself that he was not afraid to look his behaviour in

the face. If he was by an inexorable logic to pay for it he was

literally impatient to know the cost, and he held himself ready to

pay in instalments. The first instalment would be precisely this

entertainment of Sarah; as a consequence of which moreover. he

should know vastly better how he stood.

Book Eighth

I

Strether rambled alone during these few days, the effect of the

incident of the previous week having been to simplify in a marked

fashion his mixed relations with Waymarsh. Nothing had passed

between them in reference to Mrs. Newsome's summons but that our

friend had mentioned to his own the departure of the deputation

actually at sea--giving him thus an opportunity to confess to the

occult intervention he imputed to him. Waymarsh however in the

event confessed to nothing; and though this falsified in some

degree Strether's forecast the latter amusedly saw in it the same

depth of good conscience out of which the dear man's impertinence

had originally sprung. He was patient with the dear man now and

delighted to observe how unmistakeably he had put on flesh; he felt

his own holiday so successfully large and free that he was full of

allowances and charities in respect to those cabined and confined'

his instinct toward a spirit so strapped down as Waymarsh's was to

walk round it on tiptoe for fear of waking it up to a sense of

losses by this time irretrievable. It was all very funny he knew,

and but the difference, as he often said to himself, of tweedledum

and tweedledee--an emancipation so purely comparative that it was

like the advance of the door-mat on the scraper; yet the present

crisis was happily to profit by it and the pilgrim from Milrose to

know himself more than ever in the right.

Strether felt that when he heard of the approach of the Pococks the

impulse of pity quite sprang up in him beside the impulse of

triumph. That was exactly why Waymarsh had looked at him with eyes

in which the heat of justice was measured and shaded. He had looked

very hard, as if affectionately sorry for the friend--the friend of

fifty-five--whose frivolity had had thus to be recorded; becoming,

however, but obscurely sententious and leaving his companion to

formulate a charge. It was in this general attitude that he had of

late altogether taken refuge; with the drop of discussion they were

solemnly sadly superficial; Strether recognised in him the mere

portentous rumination to which Miss Barrace had so good-humouredly

described herself as assigning a corner of her salon. It was quite

as if he knew his surreptitious step had been divined, and it was

also as if he missed the chance to explain the purity of his

motive; but this privation of relief should be precisely his small

penance: it was not amiss for Strether that he should find himself

to that degree uneasy. If he had been challenged or accused,

rebuked for meddling or otherwise pulled up, he would probably have

shown, on his own system, all the height of his consistency, all

the depth of his good faith. Explicit resentment of his course

would have made him take the floor, and the thump of his fist on

the table would have affirmed him as consciously incorruptible. Had

what now really prevailed with Strether been but a dread of that

thump--a dread of wincing a little painfully at what it might

invidiously demonstrate? However this might be, at any rate, one of

the marks of the crisis was a visible, a studied lapse, in

Waymarsh, of betrayed concern. As if to make up to his comrade for

the stroke by which he had played providence he now conspicuously

ignored his movements, withdrew himself from the pretension to

share them, stiffened up his sensibility to neglect, and, clasping

his large empty hands and swinging his large restless foot, clearly

looked to another quarter for justice.

This made for independence on Strether's part, and he had in truth

at no moment of his stay been so free to go and come. The early

summer brushed the picture over and blurred everything but the

near; it made a vast warm fragrant medium in which the elements

floated together on the best of terms, in which rewards were

immediate and reckonings postponed. Chad was out of town again, for

the first time since his visitor's first view of him; he had

explained this necessity--without detail, yet also without

embarrassment, the circumstance was one of those which, in the

young man's life, testified to the variety of his ties. Strether

wasn't otherwise concerned with it than for its so testifying--a

pleasant multitudinous image in which he took comfort. He took

comfort, by the same stroke, in the swing of Chad's pendulum back

from that other swing, the sharp jerk towards Woollett, so stayed

by his own hand. He had the entertainment of thinking that if he

had for that moment stopped the clock it was to promote the next

minute this still livelier motion. He himself did what he hadn't

done before; he took two or three times whole days off--

irrespective of others, of two or three taken with Miss Gostrey,

two or three taken with little Bilham: he went to Chartres and

cultivated, before the front of the cathedral, a general easy

beatitude; he went to Fontainebleau and imagined himself on the way

to Italy; he went to Rouen with a little handbag and inordinately

spent the night.

One afternoon he did something quite different; finding himself in

the neighbourhood of a fine old house across the river, he passed

under the great arch of its doorway and asked at the porter's lodge

for Madame de Vionnet. He had already hovered more than once about

that possibility, been aware of it, in the course of ostensible

strolls, as lurking but round the corner. Only it had perversely

happened, after his morning at Notre Dame, that his consistency, as

he considered and intended it, had come back to him; whereby he had

reflected that the encounter in question had been none of his

making; clinging again intensely to the strength of his position,

which was precisely that there was nothing in it for himself. From

the moment he actively pursued the charming associate of his

adventure, from that moment his position weakened, for he was then

acting in an interested way. It was only within a few days that he

had fixed himself a limit: he promised himself his consistency

should end with Sarah's arrival. It was arguing correctly to feel

the title to a free hand conferred on him by this event. If he

wasn't to be let alone he should be merely a dupe to act with

delicacy. If he wasn't to be trusted he could at least take his

ease. If he was to be placed under control he gained leave to try

what his position MIGHT agreeably give him. An ideal rigour would

perhaps postpone the trial till after the Pococks had shown their

spirit; and it was to an ideal rigour that he had quite promised

himself to conform.

Suddenly, however, on this particular day, he felt a particular

fear under which everything collapsed. He knew abruptly that he was

afraid of himself--and yet not in relation to the effect on his

sensibilities of another hour of Madame de Vionnet. What he dreaded

was the effect of a single hour of Sarah Pocock, as to whom he was

visited, in troubled nights, with fantastic waking dreams. She

loomed at him larger than life; she increased in volume as she drew

nearer; she so met his eyes that, his imagination taking, after the

first step, all, and more than all, the strides, he already felt

her come down on him, already burned, under her reprobation, with

the blush of guilt, already consented, by way of penance, to the

instant forfeiture of everything. He saw himself, under her

direction, recommitted to Woollett as juvenile offenders are

committed to reformatories. It wasn't of course that Woollett was

really a place of discipline; but he knew in advance that Sarah's

salon at the hotel would be. His danger, at any rate, in such moods

of alarm, was some concession, on this ground, that would involve a

sharp rupture with the actual; therefore if he waited to take leave

of that actual he might wholly miss his chance. It was represented

with supreme vividness by Madame de Vionnet, and that is why, in a

word, he waited no longer. He had seen in a flash that he must

anticipate Mrs. Pocock. He was accordingly much disappointed on now

learning from the portress that the lady of his quest was not in

Paris. She had gone for some days to the country. There was nothing

in this accident but what was natural; yet it produced for poor

Strether a drop of all confidence. It was suddenly as if he should

never see her again, and as if moreover he had brought it on

himself by not having been quite kind to her.

It was the advantage of his having let his fancy lose itself for a

little in the gloom that, as by reaction, the prospect began really

to brighten from the moment the deputation from Woollett alighted

on the platform of the station. They had come straight from Havre,

having sailed from New York to that port, and having also, thanks

to a happy voyage, made land with a promptitude that left Chad

Newsome, who had meant to meet them at the dock, belated. He had

received their telegram, with the announcement of their immediate

further advance, just as he was taking the train for Havre, so that

nothing had remained for him but to await them in Paris. He hastily

picked up Strether, at the hotel, for this purpose, and he even,

with easy pleasantry, suggested the attendance of Waymarsh as well--

Waymarsh, at the moment his cab rattled up, being engaged, under

Strether's contemplative range, in a grave perambulation of the

familiar court. Waymarsh had learned from his companion, who had

already had a note, delivered by hand, from Chad, that the Pococks

were due, and had ambiguously, though, as always, impressively,

glowered at him over the circumstance; carrying himself in a manner

in which Strether was now expert enough to recognise his uncertainty,

in the premises, as to the best tone. The only tone he aimed at with

confidence was a full tone--which was necessarily difficult in the

absence of a full knowledge. The Pococks were a quantity as yet

unmeasured, and, as he had practically brought them over, so this

witness had to that extent exposed himself. He wanted to feel right

about it, but could only, at the best, for the time, feel vague.

"I shall look to you, you know, immensely," our friend had said,

"to help me with them," and he had been quite conscious of the

effect of the remark, and of others of the same sort, on his

comrade's sombre sensibility. He had insisted on the fact that

Waymarsh would quite like Mrs. Pocock--one could be certain he

would: he would be with her about everything, and she would also be

with HIM, and Miss Barrace's nose, in short, would find itself out

of joint.

Strether had woven this web of cheerfulness while they waited in

the court for Chad; he had sat smoking cigarettes to keep himself

quiet while, caged and leonine, his fellow traveller paced and

turned before him. Chad Newsome was doubtless to be struck, when he

arrived, with the sharpness of their opposition at this particular

hour; he was to remember, as a part of it, how Waymarsh came with

him and with Strether to the street and stood there with a face

half-wistful and half-rueful. They talked of him, the two others, as

they drove, and Strether put Chad in possession of much of his own

strained sense of things. He had already, a few days before, named

to him the wire he was convinced their friend had pulled--a

confidence that had made on the young man's part quite hugely for

curiosity and diversion. The action of the matter, moreover,

Strether could see, was to penetrate; he saw that is, how Chad

judged a system of influence in which Waymarsh had served as a

determinant--an impression just now quickened again; with the whole

bearing of such a fact on the youth's view of his relatives. As it

came up between them that they might now take their friend for a

feature of the control of these latter now sought to be exerted

from Woollett, Strether felt indeed how it would be stamped all

over him, half an hour later for Sarah Pocock's eyes, that he was

as much on Chad's "side" as Waymarsh had probably described him. He

was letting himself at present, go; there was no denying it; it

might be desperation, it might be confidence; he should offer

himself to the arriving travellers bristling with all the lucidity

he had cultivated.

He repeated to Chad what he had been saying in the court to

Waymarsh; how there was no doubt whatever that his sister would

find the latter a kindred spirit, no doubt of the alliance, based

on an exchange of views, that the pair would successfully strike

up. They would become as thick as thieves--which moreover was but a

development of what Strether remembered to have said in one of his

first discussions with his mate, struck as he had then already been

with the elements of affinity between that personage and Mrs.

Newsome herself. "I told him, one day, when he had questioned me on

your mother, that she was a person who, when he should know her,

would rouse in him, I was sure, a special enthusiasm; and that

hangs together with the conviction we now feel--this certitude that

Mrs. Pocock will take him into her boat. For it's your mother's own

boat that she's pulling."

"Ah," said Chad, "Mother's worth fifty of Sally!"

"A thousand; but when you presently meet her, all the same you'll

be meeting your mother's representative--just as I shall. I feel

like the outgoing ambassador," said Strether, "doing honour to his

appointed successor." A moment after speaking as he had just done

he felt he had inadvertently rather cheapened Mrs. Newsome to her

son; an impression audibly reflected, as at first seen, in Chad's

prompt protest. He had recently rather failed of apprehension of

the young man's attitude and temper--remaining principally

conscious of how little worry, at the worst, he wasted, and he

studied him at this critical hour with renewed interest. Chad had

done exactly what he had promised him a fortnight previous--had

accepted without another question his plea for delay. He was

waiting cheerfully and handsomely, but also inscrutably and with a

slight increase perhaps of the hardness originally involved in his

acquired high polish. He was neither excited nor depressed; was

easy and acute and deliberate--unhurried unflurried unworried, only

at most a little less amused than usual. Strether felt him more

than ever a justification of the extraordinary process of which his

own absurd spirit had been the arena; he knew as their cab rolled

along, knew as he hadn't even yet known, that nothing else than

what Chad had done and had been would have led to his present

showing. They had made him, these things, what he was, and the

business hadn't been easy; it had taken time and trouble, it had

cost, above all, a price. The result at any rate was now to be

offered to Sally; which Strether, so far as that was concerned, was

glad to be there to witness. Would she in the least make it out or

take it in, the result, or would she in the least care for it if

she did? He scratched his chin as he asked himself by what name,

when challenged--as he was sure he should be--he could call it for

her. Oh those were determinations she must herself arrive at; since

she wanted so much to see, let her see then and welcome. She had

come out in the pride of her competence, yet it hummed in

Strether's inner sense that she practically wouldn't see.

That this was moreover what Chad shrewdly suspected was clear from

a word that next dropped from him. "They're children; they play at

life!"--and the exclamation was significant and reassuring. It

implied that he hadn't then, for his companion's sensibility,

appeared to give Mrs. Newsome away; and it facilitated our friend's

presently asking him if it were his idea that Mrs. Pocock and

Madame de Vionnet should become acquainted. Strether was still more

sharply struck, hereupon, with Chad's lucidity. "Why, isn't that

exactly--to get a sight of the company I keep--what she has come

out for?"

"Yes--I'm afraid it is," Strether unguardedly replied.

Chad's quick rejoinder lighted his precipitation. "Why do you say

you're afraid?"

"Well, because I feel a certain responsibility. It's my testimony,

I imagine, that will have been at the bottom of Mrs. Pocock's

curiosity. My letters, as I've supposed you to understand from the

beginning, have spoken freely. I've certainly said my little say

about Madame de Vionnet."

All that, for Chad, was beautifully obvious. "Yes, but you've only

spoken handsomely."

"Never more handsomely of any woman. But it's just that tone--!"

"That tone," said Chad, "that has fetched her? I dare say; but I've

no quarrel with you about it. And no more has Madame de Vionnet.

Don't you know by this time how she likes you?"

"Oh!"--and Strether had, with his groan, a real pang of melancholy.

"For all I've done for her!"

"Ah you've done a great deal."

Chad's urbanity fairly shamed him, and he was at this moment

absolutely impatient to see the face Sarah Pocock would present to

a sort of thing, as he synthetically phrased it to himself, with no

adequate forecast of which, despite his admonitions, she would

certainly arrive. "I've done THIS!"

"Well, this is all right. She likes," Chad comfortably remarked,

"to be liked."

It gave his companion a moment's thought. "And she's sure Mrs.

Pocock WILL--?"

"No, I say that for you. She likes your liking her; it's so much,

as it were," Chad laughed, "to the good. However, she doesn't

despair of Sarah either, and is prepared, on her own side, to go

all lengths."

"In the way of appreciation?"

"Yes, and of everything else. In the way of general amiability,

hospitality and welcome. She's under arms," Chad laughed again;

"she's prepared."

Strether took it in; then as if an echo of Miss Barrace were in the

air: "She's wonderful."

"You don't begin to know HOW wonderful!"

There was a depth in it, to Strether's ear, of confirmed luxury--

almost a kind of unconscious insolence of proprietorship; but the

effect of the glimpse was not at this moment to foster speculation:

there was something so conclusive in so much graceful and generous

assurance. It was in fact a fresh evocation; and the evocation had

before many minutes another consequence. "Well, I shall see her

oftener now. I shall see her as much as I like--by your leave;

which is what I hitherto haven't done."

"It has been," said Chad, but without reproach, "only your own

fault. I tried to bring you together, and SHE, my dear fellow--I

never saw her more charming to any man. But you've got your

extraordinary ideas."

"Well, I DID have," Strether murmured, while he felt both how they

had possessed him and how they had now lost their authority. He

couldn't have traced the sequence to the end, but it was all

because of Mrs. Pocock. Mrs. Pocock might be because of Mrs. Newsome,

but that was still to be proved. What came over him was the sense

of having stupidly failed to profit where profit would have been

precious. It had been open to him to see so much more of her, and

he had but let the good days pass. Fierce in him almost was the

resolve to lose no more of them, and he whimsically reflected,

while at Chad's side he drew nearer to his destination, that it

was after all Sarah who would have quickened his chance. What

her visit of inquisition might achieve in other directions was

as yet all obscure--only not obscure that it would do supremely

much to bring two earnest persons together. He had but to listen

to Chad at this moment to feel it; for Chad was in the act of

remarking to him that they of course both counted on him--he

himself and the other earnest person--for cheer and support. It was

brave to Strether to hear him talk as if the line of wisdom they

had struck out was to make things ravishing to the Pococks. No, if

Madame de Vionnet compassed THAT, compassed the ravishment of the

Pococks, Madame de Vionnet would be prodigious. It would be a

beautiful plan if it succeeded, and it all came to the question of

Sarah's being really bribeable. The precedent of his own case

helped Strether perhaps but little to consider she might prove so;

it being distinct that her character would rather make for every

possible difference. This idea of his own bribeability set him

apart for himself; with the further mark in fact that his case was

absolutely proved. He liked always, where Lambert Strether was

concerned, to know the worst, and what he now seemed to know was

not only that he was bribeable, but that he had been effectually

bribed. The only difficulty was that he couldn't quite have said

with what. It was as if he had sold himself, but hadn't somehow got

the cash. That, however, was what, characteristically, WOULD happen

to him. It would naturally be his kind of traffic. While he thought

of these things he reminded Chad of the truth they mustn't lose

sight of--the truth that, with all deference to her susceptibility

to new interests, Sarah would have come out with a high firm

definite purpose. "She hasn't come out, you know, to be bamboozled.

We may all be ravishing--nothing perhaps can be more easy for us;

but she hasn't come out to be ravished. She has come out just

simply to take you home."

"Oh well, with HER I'll go," said Chad good-humouredly. "I suppose

you'll allow THAT." And then as for a minute Strether said nothing:

"Or is your idea that when I've seen her I shan't want to go?" As

this question, however, again left his friend silent he presently went

on: "My own idea at any rate is that they shall have while they're here

the best sort of time."

It was at this that Strether spoke. "Ah there you are! I think if

you really wanted to go--!"

"Well?" said Chad to bring it out.

"Well, you wouldn't trouble about our good time. You wouldn't care

what sort of a time we have."

Chad could always take in the easiest way in the world any

ingenious suggestion. "I see. But can I help it? I'm too decent."

"Yes, you're too decent!" Strether heavily sighed. And he felt for

the moment as if it were the preposterous end of his mission.

It ministered for the time to this temporary effect that Chad made

no rejoinder. But he spoke again as they came in sight of the

station. "Do you mean to introduce her to Miss Gostrey?"

As to this Strether was ready. "No."

"But haven't you told me they know about her?"

"I think I've told you your mother knows."

"And won't she have told Sally?"

"That's one of the things I want to see."

"And if you find she HAS--?"

"Will I then, you mean, bring them together?"

"Yes," said Chad with his pleasant promptness: "to show her there's

nothing in it."

Strether hesitated. "I don't know that I care very much what she

may think there's in it."

"Not if it represents what Mother thinks?"

"Ah what DOES your mother think?" There was in this some sound of

bewilderment.

But they were just driving up, and help, of a sort, might after all

be quite at hand. "Isn't that, my dear man, what we're both just

going to make out?"

II

Strether quitted the station half an hour later in different

company. Chad had taken charge, for the journey to the hotel, of

Sarah, Mamie, the maid and the luggage, all spaciously installed

and conveyed; and it was only after the four had rolled away that

his companion got into a cab with Jim. A strange new feeling had

come over Strether, in consequence of which his spirits had risen;

it was as if what had occurred on the alighting of his critics had

been something other than his fear, though his fear had vet not

been of an instant scene of violence. His impression had been

nothing but what was inevitable--he said that to himself; yet

relief and reassurance had softly dropped upon him. Nothing could

be so odd as to be indebted for these things to the look of faces

and the sound of voices that had been with him to satiety, as he

might have said, for years; but he now knew, all the same, how

uneasy he had felt; that was brought home to him by his present

sense of a respite. It had come moreover in the flash of an eye, it

had come in the smile with which Sarah, whom, at the window of her

compartment, they had effusively greeted from the platform, rustled

down to them a moment later, fresh and handsome from her cool June

progress through the charming land. It was only a sign, but enough:

she was going to be gracious and unallusive, she was going to play

the larger game--which was still more apparent, after she had

emerged from Chad's arms, in her direct greeting to the valued

friend of her family.

Strether WAS then as much as ever the valued friend of her family,

it was something he could at all events go on with; and the manner

of his response to it expressed even for himself how little he had

enjoyed the prospect of ceasing to figure in that likeness. He had

always seen Sarah gracious--had in fact rarely seen her shy or dry,

her marked thin-lipped smile, intense without brightness and as

prompt to act as the scrape of a safety-match; the protrusion of

her rather remarkably long chin, which in her case represented

invitation and urbanity, and not, as in most others, pugnacity and

defiance; the penetration of her voice to a distance, the general

encouragement and approval of her manner, were all elements with

which intercourse had made him familiar, but which he noted today

almost as if she had been a new acquaintance. This first glimpse of

her had given a brief but vivid accent to her resemblance to her

mother; he could have taken her for Mrs. Newsome while she met his

eyes as the train rolled into the station. It was an impression

that quickly dropped; Mrs. Newsome was much handsomer, and while

Sarah inclined to the massive her mother had, at an age, still the

girdle of a maid; also the latter's chin was rather short, than

long, and her smile, by good fortune, much more, oh ever so much

more, mercifully vague. Strether had seen Mrs. Newsome reserved; he

had literally heard her silent, though he had never known her

unpleasant. It was the case with Mrs. Pocock that he had known HER

unpleasant, even though he had never known her not affable. She had

forms of affability that were in a high degree assertive; nothing

for instance had ever been more striking than that she was affable

to Jim.

What had told in any case at the window of the train was her high

clear forehead, that forehead which her friends, for some reason,

always thought of as a "brow"; the long reach of her eyes--it came

out at this juncture in such a manner as to remind him, oddly

enough, also of that of Waymarsh's; and the unusual gloss of her

dark hair, dressed and hatted, after her mother's refined example,

with such an avoidance of extremes that it was always spoken of at

Woollett as "their own." Though this analogy dropped as soon as she

was on the platform it had lasted long enough to make him feel all

the advantage, as it were, of his relief. The woman at home, the

woman to whom he was attached, was before him just long enough to

give him again the measure of the wretchedness, in fact really of

the shame, of their having to recognise the formation, between

them, of a "split." He had taken this measure in solitude and

meditation: but the catastrophe, as Sarah steamed up, looked for

its seconds unprecedentedly dreadful--or proved, more exactly,

altogether unthinkable; so that his finding something free and

familiar to respond to brought with it an instant renewal of his

loyalty. He had suddenly sounded the whole depth, had gasped at

what he might have lost.

Well, he could now, for the quarter of an hour of their detention

hover about the travellers as soothingly as if their direct message

to him was that he had lost nothing. He wasn't going to have Sarah

write to her mother that night that he was in any way altered or

strange. There had been times enough for a month when it had seemed

to him that he was strange, that he was altered, in every way; but

that was a matter for himself; he knew at least whose business it

was not; it was not at all events such a circumstance as Sarah's

own unaided lights would help her to. Even if she had come out to

flash those lights more than yet appeared she wouldn't make much

headway against mere pleasantness. He counted on being able to be

merely pleasant to the end, and if only from incapacity moreover to

formulate anything different. He couldn't even formulate to himself

his being changed and queer; it had taken place, the process,

somewhere deep down; Maria Gostrey had caught glimpses of it; but

how was he to fish it up, even if he desired, for Mrs. Pocock? This

was then the spirit in which he hovered, and with the easier throb

in it much indebted furthermore to the impression of high and

established adequacy as a pretty girl promptly produced in him by

Mamie. He had wondered vaguely--turning over many things in the

fidget of his thoughts--if Mamie WERE as pretty as Woollett

published her; as to which issue seeing her now again was to be so

swept away by Woollett's opinion that this consequence really let

loose for the imagination an avalanche of others. There were

positively five minutes in which the last word seemed of necessity

to abide with a Woollett represented by a Mamie. This was the sort

of truth the place itself would feel; it would send her forth in

confidence; it would point to her with triumph; it would take its

stand on her with assurance; it would be conscious of no

requirements she didn't meet, of no question she couldn't answer.

Well, it was right, Strether slipped smoothly enough into the

cheerfulness of saying: granted that a community MIGHT be best

represented by a young lady of twenty-two, Mamie perfectly played

the part, played it as if she were used to it, and looked and spoke

and dressed the character. He wondered if she mightn't, in the high

light of Paris, a cool full studio-light, becoming yet treacherous,

show as too conscious of these matters; but the next moment he felt

satisfied that her consciousness was after all empty for its size,

rather too simple than too mixed, and that the kind way with her

would be not to take many things out of it, but to put as many as

possible in. She was robust and conveniently tall; just a trifle

too bloodlessly fair perhaps, but with a pleasant public familiar

radiance that affirmed her vitality. She might have been

"receiving" for Woollett, wherever she found herself, and there was

something in her manner, her tone, her motion, her pretty blue

eyes, her pretty perfect teeth and her very small, too small, nose,

that immediately placed her, to the fancy, between the windows of a

hot bright room in which voices were high--up at that end to which

people were brought to be "presented." They were there to

congratulate, these images, and Strether's renewed vision, on this

hint, completed the idea. What Mamie was like was the happy bride,

the bride after the church and just before going away. She wasn't

the mere maiden, and yet was only as much married as that quantity

came to. She was in the brilliant acclaimed festal stage. Well,

might it last her long!

Strether rejoiced in these things for Chad, who was all genial

attention to the needs of his friends, besides having arranged that

his servant should reinforce him; the ladies were certainly

pleasant to see, and Mamie would be at any time and anywhere

pleasant to exhibit. She would look extraordinarily like his young

wife--the wife of a honeymoon, should he go about with her; but

that was his own affair--or perhaps it was hers; it was at any rate

something she couldn't help. Strether remembered how he had seen

him come up with Jeanne de Vionnet in Gloriani's garden, and the

fancy he had had about that--the fancy obscured now, thickly

overlaid with others; the recollection was during these minutes his

only note of trouble. He had often, in spite of himself, wondered

if Chad but too probably were not with Jeanne the object of a still

and shaded flame. It was on the cards that the child MIGHT be

tremulously in love, and this conviction now flickered up not a bit

the less for his disliking to think of it, for its being, in a

complicated situation, a complication the more, and for something

indescribable in Mamie, something at all events straightway lent

her by his own mind, something that gave her value, gave her

intensity and purpose, as the symbol of an opposition. Little

Jeanne wasn't really at all in question--how COULD she be?--yet

from the moment Miss Pocock had shaken her skirts on the platform,

touched up the immense bows of her hat and settled properly over

her shoulder the strap of her morocco-and-gilt travelling-satchel,

from that moment little Jeanne was opposed.

It was in the cab with Jim that impressions really crowded on

Strether, giving him the strangest sense of length of absence from

people among whom he had lived for years. Having them thus come out

to him was as if he had returned to find them: and the droll

promptitude of Jim's mental reaction threw his own initiation far

back into the past. Whoever might or mightn't be suited by what was

going on among them, Jim, for one, would certainly be: his instant

recognition--frank and whimsical--of what the affair was for HIM

gave Strether a glow of pleasure. "I say, you know, this IS about

my shape, and if it hadn't been for YOU--!" so he broke out as the

charming streets met his healthy appetite; and he wound up, after

an expressive nudge, with a clap of his companion's knee and an "Oh

you, you--you ARE doing it!" that was charged with rich meaning.

Strether felt in it the intention of homage, but, with a curiosity

otherwise occupied, postponed taking it up. What he was asking

himself for the time was how Sarah Pocock, in the opportunity

already given her, had judged her brother--from whom he himself, as

they finally, at the station, separated for their different

conveyances, had had a look into which he could read more than one

message. However Sarah was judging her brother, Chad's conclusion

about his sister, and about her husband and her husband's sister,

was at the least on the way not to fail of confidence. Strether

felt the confidence, and that, as the look between them was an

exchange, what he himself gave back was relatively vague. This

comparison of notes however could wait; everything struck him as

depending on the effect produced by Chad. Neither Sarah nor Mamie

had in any way, at the station--where they had had after all ample

time--broken out about it; which, to make up for this, was what our

friend had expected of Jim as soon as they should find themselves

together.

It was queer to him that he had that noiseless brush with Chad; an

ironic intelligence with this youth on the subject of his

relatives, an intelligence carried on under their nose and, as

might be said, at their expense--such a matter marked again for him

strongly the number of stages he had come; albeit that if the

number seemed great the time taken for the final one was but the

turn of a hand. He had before this had many moments of wondering if

he himself weren't perhaps changed even as Chad was changed. Only

what in Chad was conspicuous improvement--well, he had no name

ready for the working, in his own organism, of his own more timid

dose. He should have to see first what this action would amount to.

And for his occult passage with the young man, after all, the

directness of it had no greater oddity than the fact that the young

man's way with the three travellers should have been so happy a

manifestation. Strether liked him for it, on the spot, as he hadn't

yet liked him; it affected him while it lasted as he might have

been affected by some light pleasant perfect work of art: to that

degree that he wondered if they were really worthy of it, took it

in and did it justice; to that degree that it would have been

scarce a miracle if, there in the luggage-room, while they waited

for their things, Sarah had pulled his sleeve and drawn him aside.

"You're right; we haven't quite known what you mean, Mother and I,

but now we see. Chad's magnificent; what can one want more? If THIS

is the kind of thing--!" On which they might, as it were, have

embraced and begun to work together.

Ah how much, as it was, for all her bridling brightness--which was

merely general and noticed nothing--WOULD they work together?

Strether knew he was unreasonable; he set it down to his being

nervous: people couldn't notice everything and speak of everything

in a quarter of an hour. Possibly, no doubt, also, he made too much

of Chad's display. Yet, none the less, when, at the end of five

minutes, in the cab, Jim Pocock had said nothing either--hadn't

said, that is, what Strether wanted, though he had said much else--

it all suddenly bounced back to their being either stupid or

wilful. It was more probably on the whole the former; so that that

would be the drawback of the bridling brightness. Yes, they would

bridle and be bright; they would make the best of what was before

them, but their observation would fail; it would be beyond them;

they simply wouldn't understand. Of what use would it be then that

they had come?--if they weren't to be intelligent up to THAT point:

unless indeed he himself were utterly deluded and extravagant? Was

he, on this question of Chad's improvement, fantastic and away from

the truth? Did he live in a false world, a world that had grown

simply to suit him, and was his present slight irritation--in the

face now of Jim's silence in particular--but the alarm of the vain

thing menaced by the touch of the real? Was this contribution of

the real possibly the mission of the Pococks?--had they come to

make the work of observation, as HE had practised observation,

crack and crumble, and to reduce Chad to the plain terms in which

honest minds could deal with him? Had they come in short to be sane

where Strether was destined to feel that he himself had only been

silly?

He glanced at such a contingency, but it failed to hold him long

when once he had reflected that he would have been silly, in this

case, with Maria Gostrey and little Bilham, with Madame de Vionnet

and little Jeanne, with Lambert Strether, in fine, and above all

with Chad Newsome himself. Wouldn't it be found to have made more

for reality to be silly with these persons than sane with Sarah and

Jim? Jim in fact, he presently made up his mind, was individually

out of it; Jim didn't care; Jim hadn't come out either for Chad or

for him; Jim in short left the moral side to Sally and indeed

simply availed himself now, for the sense of recreation, of the

fact that he left almost everything to Sally. He was nothing

compared to Sally, and not so much by reason of Sally's temper and

will as by that of her more developed type and greater acquaintance

with the world. He quite frankly and serenely confessed, as he sat

there with Strether, that he felt his type hang far in the rear of

his wife's and still further, if possible, in the rear of his

sister's. Their types, he well knew, were recognised and acclaimed;

whereas the most a leading Woollett business-man could hope to

achieve socially, and for that matter industrially, was a certain

freedom to play into this general glamour.

The impression he made on our friend was another of the things that

marked our friend's road. It was a strange impression, especially

as so soon produced; Strether had received it, he judged, all in

the twenty minutes; it struck him at least as but in a minor degree

the work of the long Woollett years. Pocock was normally and

consentingly though not quite wittingly out of the question. It was

despite his being normal; it was despite his being cheerful; it was

despite his being a leading Woollett business-man; and the

determination of his fate left him thus perfectly usual--as

everything else about it was clearly, to his sense, not less so. He

seemed to say that there was a whole side of life on which the

perfectly usual WAS for leading Woollett business-men to be out of

the question. He made no more of it than that, and Strether, so far

as Jim was concerned, desired to make no more. Only Strether's

imagination, as always, worked, and he asked himself if this side

of life were not somehow connected, for those who figured on it

with the fact of marriage. Would HIS relation to it, had he married

ten years before, have become now the same as Pocock's? Might it

even become the same should he marry in a few months? Should he

ever know himself as much out of the question for Mrs. Newsome as

Jim knew himself--in a dim way--for Mrs. Jim?

To turn his eyes in that direction was to be personally reassured;

he was different from Pocock; he had affirmed himself differently

and was held after all in higher esteem. What none the less came

home to him, however, at this hour, was that the society over

there, that of which Sarah and Mamie--and, in a more eminent way,

Mrs. Newsome herself--were specimens, was essentially a society of

women, and that poor Jim wasn't in it. He himself Lambert Strether,

WAS as yet in some degree--which was an odd situation for a man;

but it kept coming back to him in a whimsical way that he should

perhaps find his marriage had cost him his place. This occasion

indeed, whatever that fancy represented, was not a time of sensible

exclusion for Jim, who was in a state of manifest response to the

charm of his adventure. Small and fat and constantly facetious,

straw-coloured and destitute of marks, he would have been

practically indistinguishable hadn't his constant preference for

light-grey clothes, for white hats, for very big cigars and very

little stories, done what it could for his identity. There were

signs in him, though none of them plaintive, of always paying for

others; and the principal one perhaps was just this failure of

type. It was with this that he paid, rather than with fatigue or

waste; and also doubtless a little with the effort of humour--never

irrelevant to the conditions, to the relations, with which he was

acquainted.

He gurgled his joy as they rolled through the happy streets; he

declared that his trip was a regular windfall, and that he wasn't

there, he was eager to remark, to hang back from anything: he

didn't know quite what Sally had come for, but HE had come for a

good time. Strether indulged him even while wondering if what Sally

wanted her brother to go back for was to become like her husband.

He trusted that a good time was to be, out and out, the programme

for all of them; and he assented liberally to Jim's proposal that,

disencumbered and irresponsible--his things were in the omnibus

with those of the others--they should take a further turn round

before going to the hotel. It wasn't for HIM to tackle Chad--it was

Sally's job; and as it would be like her, he felt, to open fire on

the spot, it wouldn't be amiss of them to hold off and give her

time. Strether, on his side, only asked to give her time; so he

jogged with his companion along boulevards and avenues, trying to

extract from meagre material some forecast of his catastrophe. He

was quick enough to see that Jim Pocock declined judgement, had

hovered quite round the outer edge of discussion and anxiety,

leaving all analysis of their question to the ladies alone and now

only feeling his way toward some small droll cynicism. It broke out

afresh, the cynicism--it had already shown a flicker--in a but

slightly deferred: "Well, hanged if I would if I were he!"

"You mean you wouldn't in Chad's place--?"

"Give up this to go back and boss the advertising!" Poor Jim, with

his arms folded and his little legs out in the open fiacre, drank

in the sparkling Paris noon and carried his eyes from one side of

their vista to the other. "Why I want to come right out and live

here myself. And I want to live while I AM here too. I feel with

YOU--oh you've been grand, old man, and I've twigged--that it ain't

right to worry Chad. I don't mean to persecute him; I couldn't in

conscience. It's thanks to you at any rate that I'm here, and I'm

sure I'm much obliged. You're a lovely pair."

There were things in this speech that Strether let pass for the

time. "Don't you then think it important the advertising should be

thoroughly taken in hand? Chad WILL be, so far as capacity is

concerned," he went on, "the man to do it."

"Where did he get his capacity," Jim asked, "over here?"

"He didn't get it over here, and the wonderful thing is that over

here he hasn't inevitably lost it. He has a natural turn for

business, an extraordinary head. He comes by that," Strether

explained, "honestly enough. He's in that respect his father's son,

and also--for she's wonderful in her way too--his mother's. He has

other tastes and other tendencies; but Mrs. Newsome and your wife

are quite right about his having that. He's very remarkable."

"Well, I guess he is!" Jim Pocock comfortably sighed. "But if

you've believed so in his making us hum, why have you so prolonged

the discussion? Don't you know we've been quite anxious about you?"

These questions were not informed with earnestness, but Strether

saw he must none the less make a choice and take a line. "Because,

you see, I've greatly liked it. I've liked my Paris, I dare say

I've liked it too much."

"Oh you old wretch!" Jim gaily exclaimed.

"But nothing's concluded," Strether went on. "The case is more

complex than it looks from Woollett."

"Oh well, it looks bad enough from Woollett!" Jim declared.

"Even after all I've written?"

Jim bethought himself. "Isn't it what you've written that has made

Mrs. Newsome pack us off? That at least and Chad's not turning up?"

Strether made a reflexion of his own. "I see. That she should do

something was, no doubt, inevitable, and your wife has therefore of

course come out to act."

"Oh yes," Jim concurred--"to act. But Sally comes out to act, you

know," he lucidly added, "every time she leaves the house. She

never comes out but she DOES act. She's acting moreover now for her

mother, and that fixes the scale." Then he wound up, opening all

his senses to it, with a renewed embrace of pleasant Paris. "We

haven't all the same at Woollett got anything like this."

Strether continued to consider. "I'm bound to say for you all that

you strike me as having arrived in a very mild and reasonable frame

of mind. You don't show your claws. I felt just now in Mrs. Pocock

no symptom of that. She isn't fierce," he went on. "I'm such a

nervous idiot that I thought she might be."

"Oh don't you know her well enough," Pocock asked, "to have noticed

that she never gives herself away, any more than her mother ever

does? They ain't fierce, either of 'em; they let you come quite

close. They wear their fur the smooth side out--the warm side in.

Do you know what they are?" Jim pursued as he looked about him,

giving the question, as Strether felt, but half his care--"do you

know what they are? They're about as intense as they can live."

"Yes"--and Strether's concurrence had a positive precipitation;

"they're about as intense as they can live."

"They don't lash about and shake the cage," said Jim, who seemed

pleased with his analogy; "and it's at feeding-time that they're

quietest. But they always get there."

"They do indeed--they always get there!" Strether replied with a

laugh that justified his confession of nervousness. He disliked to

be talking sincerely of Mrs. Newsome with Pocock; he could have

talked insincerely. But there was something he wanted to know, a

need created in him by her recent intermission, by his having

given from the first so much, as now more than ever appeared to

him, and got so little. It was as if a queer truth in his

companion's metaphor had rolled over him with a rush. She HAD been

quiet at feeding-time; she had fed, and Sarah had fed with her,

out of the big bowl of all his recent free communication, his

vividness and pleasantness, his ingenuity and even his eloquence,

while the current of her response had steadily run thin. Jim

meanwhile however, it was true, slipped characteristically into

shallowness from the moment he ceased to speak out of the

experience of a husband.

"But of course Chad has now the advantage of being there before

her. If he doesn't work that for all it's worth--!" He sighed with

contingent pity at his brother-in-law's possible want of resource.

"He has worked it on YOU, pretty well, eh?" and he asked the next

moment if there were anything new at the Varieties, which he

pronounced in the American manner. They talked about the

Varieties--Strether confessing to a knowledge which produced again

on Pocock's part a play of innuendo as vague as a nursery-rhyme,

yet as aggressive as an elbow in his side; and they finished their

drive under the protection of easy themes. Strether waited to the

end, but still in vain, for any show that Jim had seen Chad as

different; and he could scarce have explained the discouragement

he drew from the absence of this testimony. It was what he had

taken his own stand on, so far as he had taken a stand; and if

they were all only going to see nothing he had only wasted his

time. He gave his friend till the very last moment, till they had

come into sight of the hotel; and when poor Pocock only continued

cheerful and envious and funny he fairly grew to dislike him, to

feel him extravagantly common. If they were ALL going to see

nothing!--Strether knew, as this came back to him, that he was

also letting Pocock represent for him what Mrs. Newsome wouldn't

see. He went on disliking, in the light of Jim's commonness, to

talk to him about that lady; yet just before the cab pulled up he

knew the extent of his desire for the real word from Woollett.

"Has Mrs. Newsome at all given way--?"

"'Given way'?"--Jim echoed it with the practical derision of his

sense of a long past.

"Under the strain, I mean, of hope deferred, of disappointment

repeated and thereby intensified."

"Oh is she prostrate, you mean?"--he had his categories in hand.

"Why yes, she's prostrate--just as Sally is. But they're never so

lively, you know, as when they're prostrate."

"Ah Sarah's prostrate?" Strether vaguely murmured.

"It's when they're prostrate that they most sit up."

"And Mrs. Newsome's sitting up?"

"All night, my boy--for YOU!" And Jim fetched him, with a vulgar

little guffaw, a thrust that gave relief to the picture. But he

had got what he wanted. He felt on the spot that this WAS the real

word from Woollett. "So don't you go home!" Jim added while he

alighted and while his friend, letting him profusely pay the

cabman, sat on in a momentary muse. Strether wondered if that

were the real word too.

III

As the door of Mrs. Pocock's salon was pushed open for him, the

next day, well before noon, he was reached by a voice with a

charming sound that made him just falter before crossing the

threshold. Madame de Vionnet was already on the field, and this

gave the drama a quicker pace than he felt it as yet--though his

suspense had increased--in the power of any act of his own to do.

He had spent the previous evening with all his old friends

together yet he would still have described himself as quite in the

dark in respect to a forecast of their influence on his situation.

It was strange now, none the less, that in the light of this

unexpected note of her presence he felt Madame de Vionnet a part

of that situation as she hadn't even yet been. She was alone, he

found himself assuming, with Sarah, and there was a bearing in

that--somehow beyond his control--on his personal fate. Yet she

was only saying something quite easy and independent--the thing

she had come, as a good friend of Chad's, on purpose to say.

"There isn't anything at all--? I should be so delighted."

It was clear enough, when they were there before him, how she had

been received. He saw this, as Sarah got up to greet him, from

something fairly hectic in Sarah's face. He saw furthermore that

they weren't, as had first come to him, alone together; he was at

no loss as to the identity of the broad high back presented to

him in the embrasure of the window furthest from the door.

Waymarsh, whom he had to-day not yet seen, whom he only knew to

have left the hotel before him, and who had taken part, the night

previous, on Mrs. Pocock's kind invitation, conveyed by Chad, in

the entertainment, informal but cordial, promptly offered by that

lady--Waymarsh had anticipated him even as Madame de Vionnet had

done, and, with his hands in his pockets and his attitude

unaffected by Strether's entrance, was looking out, in marked

detachment, at the Rue de Rivoli. The latter felt it in the air--

it was immense how Waymarsh could mark things---that he had remained

deeply dissociated from the overture to their hostess that we have

recorded on Madame de Vionnet's side. He had, conspicuously, tact,

besides a stiff general view; and this was why he had left Mrs.

Pocock to struggle alone. He would outstay the visitor; he would

unmistakeably wait; to what had he been doomed for months past but

waiting? Therefore she was to feel that she had him in reserve.

What support she drew from this was still to be seen, for, although

Sarah was vividly bright, she had given herself up for the moment

to an ambiguous flushed formalism. She had had to reckon more

quickly than she expected; but it concerned her first of all to

signify that she was not to be taken unawares. Strether arrived

precisely in time for her showing it. "Oh you're too good; but I

don't think I feel quite helpless. I have my brother--and these

American friends. And then you know I've been to Paris. I KNOW

Paris," said Sally Pocock in a tone that breathed a certain chill

on Strether's heart.

"Ah but a woman, in this tiresome place where everything's always

changing, a woman of good will," Madame de Vionnet threw off, "can

always help a woman. I'm sure you 'know'--but we know perhaps

different things." She too, visibly, wished to make no mistake; but

it was a fear of a different order and more kept out of sight. She

smiled in welcome at Strether; she greeted him more familiarly than

Mrs. Pocock; she put out her hand to him without moving from her

place; and it came to him in the course of a minute and in the

oddest way that--yes, positively--she was giving him over to ruin.

She was all kindness and ease, but she couldn't help so giving him;

she was exquisite, and her being just as she was poured for Sarah a

sudden rush of meaning into his own equivocations. How could she

know how she was hurting him? She wanted to show as simple and

humble--in the degree compatible with operative charm; but it was

just this that seemed to put him on her side. She struck him as

dressed, as arranged, as prepared infinitely to conciliate--with

the very poetry of good taste in her view of the conditions of her

early call. She was ready to advise about dressmakers and shops;

she held herself wholly at the disposition of Chad's family.

Strether noticed her card on the table--her coronet and her

"Comtesse"--and the imagination was sharp in him of certain private

adjustments in Sarah's mind. She had never, he was sure, sat with a

"Comtesse" before, and such was the specimen of that class he had

been keeping to play on her. She had crossed the sea very

particularly for a look at her; but he read in Madame de Vionnet's

own eyes that this curiosity hadn't been so successfully met as

that she herself wouldn't now have more than ever need of him. She

looked much as she had looked to him that morning at Notre Dame; he

noted in fact the suggestive sameness of her discreet and delicate

dress. It seemed to speak--perhaps a little prematurely or too

finely--of the sense in which she would help Mrs. Pocock with the

shops. The way that lady took her in, moreover, added depth to his

impression of what Miss Gostrey, by their common wisdom, had

escaped. He winced as he saw himself but for that timely prudence

ushering in Maria as a guide and an example. There was however a

touch of relief for him in his glimpse, so far as he had got it, of

Sarah's line. She "knew Paris." Madame de Vionnet had, for that

matter, lightly taken this up. "Ah then you've a turn for that, an

affinity that belongs to your family. Your brother, though his long

experience makes a difference, I admit, has become one of us in a

marvellous way." And she appealed to Strether in the manner of a

woman who could always glide off with smoothness into another

subject. Wasn't HE struck with the way Mr. Newsome had made the

place his own, and hadn't he been in a position to profit by his

friend's wondrous expertness?

Strether felt the bravery, at the least, of her presenting herself

so promptly to sound that note, and yet asked himself what other

note, after all, she COULD strike from the moment she presented

herself at all. She could meet Mrs. Pocock only on the ground of

the obvious, and what feature of Chad's situation was more eminent

than the fact that he had created for himself a new set of

circumstances? Unless she hid herself altogether she could show but

as one of these, an illustration of his domiciled and indeed of his

confirmed condition. And the consciousness of all this in her

charming eyes was so clear and fine that as she thus publicly drew

him into her boat she produced in him such a silent agitation as he

was not to fail afterwards to denounce as pusillanimous. "Ah don't

be so charming to me!--for it makes us intimate, and after all what

IS between us when I've been so tremendously on my guard and have

seen you but half a dozen times?" He recognised once more the

perverse law that so inveterately governed his poor personal

aspects: it would be exactly LIKE the way things always turned out

for him that he should affect Mrs. Pocock and Waymarsh as launched

in a relation in which he had really never been launched at all.

They were at this very moment--they could only be--attributing to

him the full licence of it, and all by the operation of her own

tone with him; whereas his sole licence had been to cling with

intensity to the brink, not to dip so much as a toe into the flood.

But the flicker of his fear on this occasion was not, as may be

added, to repeat itself; it sprang up, for its moment, only to die

down and then go out for ever. To meet his fellow visitor's

invocation and, with Sarah's brilliant eyes on him, answer, WAS

quite sufficiently to step into her boat. During the rest of the

time her visit lasted he felt himself proceed to each of the proper

offices, successively, for helping to keep the adventurous skiff

afloat. It rocked beneath him, but he settled himself in his place.

He took up an oar and, since he was to have the credit of pulling,

pulled.

"That will make it all the pleasanter if it so happens that we DO

meet," Madame de Vionnet had further observed in reference to Mrs.

Pocock's mention of her initiated state; and she had immediately

added that, after all, her hostess couldn't be in need with the

good offices of Mr. Strether so close at hand. "It's he, I gather,

who has learnt to know his Paris, and to love it, better than any

one ever before in so short a time; so that between him and your

brother, when it comes to the point, how can you possibly want for

good guidance? The great thing, Mr. Strether will show you," she

smiled, "is just to let one's self go."

"Oh I've not let myself go very far," Strether answered, feeling

quite as if he had been called upon to hint to Mrs. Pocock how

Parisians could talk. "I'm only afraid of showing I haven't let

myself go far enough. I've taken a good deal of time, but I must

quite have had the air of not budging from one spot." He looked at

Sarah in a manner that he thought she might take as engaging, and

he made, under Madame de Vionnet's protection, as it were, his

first personal point. "What has really happened has been that, all

the while, I've done what I came out for."

Yet it only at first gave Madame de Vionnet a chance immediately to

take him up. "You've renewed acquaintance with your friend--you've

learnt to know him again." She spoke with such cheerful helpfulness

that they might, in a common cause, have been calling together and

pledged to mutual aid.

Waymarsh, at this, as if he had been in question, straightway

turned from the window. "Oh yes, Countess--he has renewed

acquaintance with ME, and he HAS, I guess, learnt something about

me, though I don't know how much he has liked it. It's for Strether

himself to say whether he has felt it justifies his course."

"Oh but YOU," said the Countess gaily, "are not in the least what

he came out for--is he really, Strether? and I hadn't you at all in

my mind. I was thinking of Mr. Newsome, of whom we think so much

and with whom, precisely, Mrs. Pocock has given herself the

opportunity to take up threads. What a pleasure for you both!"

Madame de Vionnet, with her eyes on Sarah, bravely continued.

Mrs. Pocock met her handsomely, but Strether quickly saw she meant

to accept no version of her movements or plans from any other lips.

She required no patronage and no support, which were but other

names for a false position; she would show in her own way what she

chose to show, and this she expressed with a dry glitter that

recalled to him a fine Woollett winter morning. "I've never wanted

for opportunities to see my brother. We've many things to think of

at home, and great responsibilities and occupations, and our home's

not an impossible place. We've plenty of reasons," Sarah continued

a little piercingly, "for everything we do"--and in short she

wouldn't give herself the least little scrap away. But she added as

one who was always bland and who could afford a concession: "I've

come because--well, because we do come."

"Ah then fortunately!"--Madame de Vionnet breathed it to the air.

Five minutes later they were on their feet for her to take leave,

standing together in an affability that had succeeded in surviving

a further exchange of remarks; only with the emphasised appearance

on Waymarsh's part of a tendency to revert, in a ruminating manner

and as with an instinctive or a precautionary lightening of his

tread, to an open window and his point of vantage. The glazed and

gilded room, all red damask, ormolu, mirrors, clocks, looked south,

and the shutters were bowed upon the summer morning; but the

Tuileries garden and what was beyond it, over which the whole place

hung, were things visible through gaps; so that the far-spreading

presence of Paris came up in coolness, dimness and invitation, in

the twinkle of gilt-tipped palings, the crunch of gravel, the click

of hoofs, the crack of whips, things that suggested some parade of

the circus. "I think it probable," said Mrs. Pocock, "that I shall

have the opportunity of going to my brother's I've no doubt it's

very pleasant indeed." She spoke as to Strether, but her face was

turned with an intensity of brightness to Madame de Vionnet, and

there was a moment during which, while she thus fronted her, our

friend expected to hear her add: "I'm much obliged to you, I'm

sure, for inviting me there." He guessed that for five seconds

these words were on the point of coming; he heard them as clearly

as if they had been spoken; but he presently knew they had just

failed--knew it by a glance, quick and fine, from Madame de

Vionnet, which told him that she too had felt them in the air, but

that the point had luckily not been made in any manner requiring

notice. This left her free to reply only to what had been said.

"That the Boulevard Malesherbes may be common ground for us offers

me the best prospect I see for the pleasure of meeting you again."

"Oh I shall come to see you, since you've been so good": and Mrs.

Pocock looked her invader well in the eyes. The flush in Sarah's

cheeks had by this time settled to a small definite crimson spot

that was not without its own bravery; she held her head a good deal

up, and it came to Strether that of the two, at this moment, she

was the one who most carried out the idea of a Countess. He quite

took in, however, that she would really return her visitor's

civility: she wouldn't report again at Woollett without at least so

much producible history as that in her pocket.

"I want extremely to be able to show you my little daughter."

Madame de Vionnet went on; "and I should have brought her with me

if I hadn't wished first to ask your leave. I was in hopes I should

perhaps find Miss Pocock, of whose being with you I've heard from

Mr. Newsome and whose acquaintance I should so much like my child

to make. If I have the pleasure of seeing her and you do permit it

I shall venture to ask her to be kind to Jeanne. Mr. Strether will

tell you"--she beautifully kept it up--"that my poor girl is gentle

and good and rather lonely. They've made friends, he and she, ever

so happily, and he doesn't, I believe, think ill of her. As for

Jeanne herself he has had the same success with her that I know he

has had here wherever he has turned." She seemed to ask him for

permission to say these things, or seemed rather to take it, softly

and happily, with the ease of intimacy, for granted, and he had

quite the consciousness now that not to meet her at any point more

than halfway would be odiously, basely to abandon her. Yes, he was

WITH her, and, opposed even in this covert, this semi-safe fashion

to those who were not, he felt, strangely and confusedly, but

excitedly, inspiringly, how much and how far. It was as if he had

positively waited in suspense for something from her that would let

him in deeper, so that he might show her how he could take it. And

what did in fact come as she drew out a little her farewell served

sufficiently the purpose. "As his success is a matter that I'm sure

he'll never mention for himself, I feel, you see, the less scruple;

which it's very good of me to say, you know, by the way," she added

as she addressed herself to him; "considering how little direct

advantage I've gained from your triumphs with ME. When does one

ever see you? I wait at home and I languish. You'll have rendered

me the service, Mrs. Pocock, at least," she wound up, "of giving me

one of my much-too-rare glimpses of this gentleman."

"I certainly should be sorry to deprive you of anything that seems

so much, as you describe it, your natural due. Mr. Strether and I

are very old friends," Sarah allowed, "but the privilege of his

society isn't a thing I shall quarrel about with any one."

"And yet, dear Sarah," he freely broke in, "I feel, when I hear you

say that, that you don't quite do justice to the important truth of

the extent to which--as you're also mine--I'm your natural due. I

should like much better," he laughed, "to see you fight for me."

She met him, Mrs. Pocock, on this, with an arrest of speech--with a

certain breathlessness, as he immediately fancied, on the score of

a freedom for which she wasn't quite prepared. It had flared up--

for all the harm he had intended by it--because, confoundedly, he

didn't want any more to be afraid about her than he wanted to be

afraid about Madame de Vionnet. He had never, naturally, called her

anything but Sarah at home, and though he had perhaps never quite

so markedly invoked her as his "dear," that was somehow partly

because no occasion had hitherto laid so effective a trap for it.

But something admonished him now that it was too late--unless

indeed it were possibly too early; and that he at any rate

shouldn't have pleased Mrs. Pocock the more by it. "Well, Mr.

Strether--!" she murmured with vagueness, yet with sharpness, while

her crimson spot burned a trifle brighter and he was aware that

this must be for the present the limit of her response. Madame de

Vionnet had already, however, come to his aid, and Waymarsh, as if

for further participation, moved again back to them. It was true

that the aid rendered by Madame de Vionnet was questionable; it was

a sign that, for all one might confess to with her, and for all she

might complain of not enjoying, she could still insidiously show

how much of the material of conversation had accumulated between

them.

"The real truth is, you know, that you sacrifice one without mercy

to dear old Maria. She leaves no room in your life for anybody

else. Do you know," she enquired of Mrs. Pocock, "about dear old

Maria? The worst is that Miss Gostrey is really a wonderful woman."

"Oh yes indeed," Strether answered for her, "Mrs. Pocock knows

about Miss Gostrey. Your mother, Sarah, must have told you about

her; your mother knows everything," he sturdily pursued. "And I

cordially admit," he added with his conscious gaiety of courage,

"that she's as wonderful a woman as you like."

"Ah it isn't I who 'like,' dear Mr. Strether, anything to do with

the matter!" Sarah Pocock promptly protested; "and I'm by no means

sure I have--from my mother or from any one else--a notion of whom

you're talking about."

"Well, he won't let you see her, you know," Madame de Vionnet

sympathetically threw in. "He never lets me--old friends as we are:

I mean as I am with Maria. He reserves her for his best hours;

keeps her consummately to himself; only gives us others the crumbs

of the feast."

"Well, Countess, I'VE had some of the crumbs," Waymarsh observed

with weight and covering her with his large look; which led her to

break in before he could go on.

"Comment donc, he shares her with YOU?" she exclaimed in droll

stupefaction. "Take care you don't have, before you go much

further, rather more of all ces dames than you may know what to do

with!"

But he only continued in his massive way. "I can post you about the

lady, Mrs. Pocock, so far as you may care to hear. I've seen her

quite a number of times, and I was practically present when they

made acquaintance. I've kept my eye on her right along, but I don't

know as there's any real harm in her."

"'Harm'?" Madame de Vionnet quickly echoed. "Why she's the dearest

and cleverest of all the clever and dear."

"Well, you run her pretty close, Countess," Waymarsh returned with

spirit; "though there's no doubt she's pretty well up in things.

She knows her way round Europe. Above all there's no doubt she does

love Strether."

"Ah but we all do that--we all love Strether: it isn't a merit!"

their fellow visitor laughed, keeping to her idea with a good

conscience at which our friend was aware that he marvelled, though

he trusted also for it, as he met her exquisitely expressive eyes,

to some later light.

The prime effect of her tone, however--and it was a truth which his

own eyes gave back to her in sad ironic play--could only be to make

him feel that, to say such things to a man in public, a woman must

practically think of him as ninety years old. He had turned

awkwardly, responsively red, he knew, at her mention of Maria

Gostrey; Sarah Pocock's presence--the particular quality of it--had

made this inevitable; and then he had grown still redder in

proportion as he hated to have shown anything at all. He felt

indeed that he was showing much, as, uncomfortably and almost in

pain, he offered up his redness to Waymarsh, who, strangely enough,

seemed now to be looking at him with a certain explanatory

yearning. Something deep--something built on their old old

relation--passed, in this complexity, between them; he got the

side-wind of a loyalty that stood behind all actual queer

questions. Waymarsh's dry bare humour--as it gave itself to be

taken--gloomed out to demand justice. "Well, if you talk of Miss

Barrace I've MY chance too," it appeared stiffly to nod, and it

granted that it was giving him away, but struggled to add that it

did so only to save him. The sombre glow stared it at him till it

fairly sounded out--"to save you, poor old man, to save you; to

save you in spite of yourself." Yet it was somehow just this

communication that showed him to himself as more than ever lost.

Still another result of it was to put before him as never yet that

between his comrade and the interest represented by Sarah there was

already a basis. Beyond all question now, yes: Waymarsh had been in

occult relation with Mrs. Newsome--out, out it all came in the very

effort of his face. "Yes, you're feeling my hand"--he as good as

proclaimed it; "but only because this at least I SHALL have got out

of the damned Old World: that I shall have picked up the pieces

into which it has caused you to crumble." It was as if in short,

after an instant, Strether had not only had it from him, but had

recognised that so far as this went the instant had cleared the

air. Our friend understood and approved; he had the sense that they

wouldn't otherwise speak of it. This would be all, and it would

mark in himself a kind of intelligent generosity. It was with grim

Sarah then--Sarah grim for all her grace--that Waymarsh had begun

at ten o'clock in the morning to save him. Well--if he COULD, poor

dear man, with his big bleak kindness! The upshot of which crowded

perception was that Strether, on his own side, still showed no more

than he absolutely had to. He showed the least possible by saying

to Mrs. Pocock after an interval much briefer than our glance at

the picture reflected in him: "Oh it's as true as they please!--

There's no Miss Gostrey for any one but me--not the least little

peep. I keep her to myself."

"Well, it's very good of you to notify me," Sarah replied without

looking at him and thrown for a moment by this discrimination, as

the direction of her eyes showed, upon a dimly desperate little

community with Madame de Vionnet. "But I hope I shan't miss her too

much."

Madame de Vionnet instantly rallied. "And you know--though it might

occur to one--it isn't in the least that he's ashamed of her.

She's really--in a way--extremely good-looking."

"Ah but extremely!" Strether laughed while he wondered at the odd

part he found thus imposed on him.

It continued to be so by every touch from Madame de Vionnet. "Well,

as I say, you know, I wish you would keep ME a little more to

yourself. Couldn't you name some day for me, some hour--and better

soon than late? I'll be at home whenever it best suits you.

There--I can't say fairer."

Strether thought a moment while Waymarsh and Mrs. Pocock affected

him as standing attentive. "I did lately call on you. Last week--

while Chad was out of town."

"Yes--and I was away, as it happened, too. You choose your moments

well. But don't wait for my next absence, for I shan't make

another," Madame de Vionnet declared, "while Mrs. Pocock's here."

"That vow needn't keep you long, fortunately," Sarah observed with

reasserted suavity. "I shall be at present but a short time in

Paris. I have my plans for other countries. I meet a number of

charming friends"--and her voice seemed to caress that description

of these persons.

"Ah then," her visitor cheerfully replied, "all the more reason!

To-morrow, for instance, or next day?" she continued to Strether.

"Tuesday would do for me beautifully."

"Tuesday then with pleasure."

"And at half-past five?--or at six?"

It was ridiculous, but Mrs. Pocock and Waymarsh struck him as

fairly waiting for his answer. It was indeed as if they were

arranged, gathered for a performance, the performance of "Europe"

by his confederate and himself. Well, the performance could only

go on. "Say five forty-five."

"Five forty-five--good." And now at last Madame de Vionnet must

leave them, though it carried, for herself, the performance a

little further. "I DID hope so much also to see Miss Pocock.

Mayn't I still?"

Sarah hesitated, but she rose equal. "She'll return your visit with

me. She's at present out with Mr. Pocock and my brother."

"I see--of course Mr. Newsome has everything to show them. He has

told me so much about her. My great desire's to give my daughter

the opportunity of making her acquaintance. I'm always on the

lookout for such chances for her. If I didn't bring her to-day it

was only to make sure first that you'd let me." After which the

charming woman risked a more intense appeal. "It wouldn't suit you

also to mention some near time, so that we shall be sure not to

lose you?" Strether on his side waited, for Sarah likewise had,

after all, to perform; and it occupied him to have been thus

reminded that she had stayed at home--and on her first morning of

Paris--while Chad led the others forth. Oh she was up to her eyes;

if she had stayed at home she had stayed by an understanding,

arrived at the evening before, that Waymarsh would come and find

her alone. This was beginning well--for a first day in Paris; and

the thing might be amusing yet. But Madame de Vionnet's earnestness

was meanwhile beautiful. "You may think me indiscreet, but I've

SUCH a desire my Jeanne shall know an American girl of the really

delightful kind. You see I throw myself for it on your charity."

The manner of this speech gave Strether such a sense of depths

below it and behind it as he hadn't yet had--ministered in a way

that almost frightened him to his dim divinations of reasons; but

if Sarah still, in spite of it, faltered, this was why he had time

for a sign of sympathy with her petitioner. "Let me say then, dear

lady, to back your plea, that Miss Mamie is of the most delightful

kind of all--is charming among the charming."

Even Waymarsh, though with more to produce on the subject, could

get into motion in time. "Yes, Countess, the American girl's a

thing that your country must at least allow ours the privilege to

say we CAN show you. But her full beauty is only for those who know

how to make use of her."

"Ah then," smiled Madame de Vionnet, "that's exactly what I want to

do. I'm sure she has much to teach us."

It was wonderful, but what was scarce less so was that Strether

found himself, by the quick effect of it, moved another way. "Oh

that may be! But don't speak of your own exquisite daughter, you

know, as if she weren't pure perfection. I at least won't take that

from you. Mademoiselle de Vionnet," he explained, in considerable

form, to Mrs. Pocock, "IS pure perfection. Mademoiselle de Vionnet

IS exquisite."

It had been perhaps a little portentous, but "Ah?" Sarah simply

glittered.

Waymarsh himself, for that matter, apparently recognised, in

respect to the facts, the need of a larger justice, and he had with

it an inclination to Sarah. "Miss Jane's strikingly handsome--

in the regular French style."

It somehow made both Strether and Madame de Vionnet laugh out,

though at the very moment he caught in Sarah's eyes, as glancing at

the speaker, a vague but unmistakeable "You too?" It made Waymarsh

in fact look consciously over her head. Madame de Vionnet

meanwhile, however, made her point in her own way. "I wish indeed I

could offer you my poor child as a dazzling attraction: it would

make one's position simple enough! She's as good as she can be, but

of course she's different, and the question is now--in the light of

the way things seem to go--if she isn't after all TOO different:

too different I mean from the splendid type every one is so agreed

that your wonderful country produces. On the other hand of course

Mr. Newsome, who knows it so well, has, as a good friend, dear kind

man that he is, done everything he can--to keep us from fatal

benightedness--for my small shy creature. Well," she wound up after

Mrs. Pocock had signified, in a murmur still a little stiff, that

she would speak to her own young charge on the question--"well, we

shall sit, my child and I, and wait and wait and wait for you." But

her last fine turn was for Strether. "Do speak of us in such a way--!"

"As that something can't but come of it? Oh something SHALL come of

it! I take a great interest!" he further declared; and in proof of

it, the next moment, he had gone with her down to her carriage.

Book Ninth

I

"The difficulty is," Strether said to Madame de Vionnet a couple of

days later, "that I can't surprise them into the smallest sign of

his not being the same old Chad they've been for the last three

years glowering at across the sea. They simply won't give any, and

as a policy, you know--what you call a parti pris, a deep game--

that's positively remarkable."

It was so remarkable that our friend had pulled up before his

hostess with the vision of it; he had risen from his chair at the

end of ten minutes and begun, as a help not to worry, to move about

before her quite as he moved before Maria. He had kept his

appointment with her to the minute and had been intensely impatient,

though divided in truth between the sense of having everything

to tell her and the sense of having nothing at all. The short

interval had, in the face of their complication, multiplied his

impressions--it being meanwhile to be noted, moreover, that he

already frankly, already almost publicly, viewed the complication

as common to them. If Madame de Vionnet, under Sarah's eyes, had

pulled him into her boat, there was by this time no doubt whatever

that he had remained in it and that what he had really most been

conscious of for many hours together was the movement of the vessel

itself. They were in it together this moment as they hadn't yet

been, and he hadn't at present uttered the least of the words of

alarm or remonstrance that had died on his lips at the hotel. He

had other things to say to her than that she had put him in a

position; so quickly had his position grown to affect him as quite

excitingly, altogether richly, inevitable. That the outlook,

however--given the point of exposure--hadn't cleared up half so

much as he had reckoned was the first warning she received from him

on his arrival. She had replied with indulgence that he was in too

great a hurry, and had remarked soothingly that if she knew how to

be patient surely HE might be. He felt her presence, on the spot,

he felt her tone and everything about her, as an aid to that effort;

and it was perhaps one of the proofs of her success with him

that he seemed so much to take his ease while they talked.

By the time he had explained to her why his impressions, though

multiplied, still baffled him, it was as if he had been familiarly

talking for hours. They baffled him because Sarah--well, Sarah was

deep, deeper than she had ever yet had a chance to show herself.

He didn't say that this was partly the effect of her opening so

straight down, as it were, into her mother, and that, given

Mrs. Newsome's profundity, the shaft thus sunk might well have a reach;

but he wasn't without a resigned apprehension that, at such a rate

of confidence between the two women, he was likely soon to be moved

to show how already, at moments, it had been for him as if he were

dealing directly with Mrs. Newsome. Sarah, to a certainty, would

have begun herself to feel it in him--and this naturally put it in

her power to torment him the more. From the moment she knew he

COULD be tormented--!

"But WHY can you be?"--his companion was surprised at his use of

the word.

"Because I'm made so--I think of everything."

"Ah one must never do that," she smiled. "One must think of as few

things as possible."

"Then," he answered, "one must pick them out right. But all I mean

is--for I express myself with violence--that she's in a position to

watch me. There's an element of suspense for me, and she can see me

wriggle. But my wriggling doesn't matter," he pursued. "I can bear

it. Besides, I shall wriggle out."

The picture at any rate stirred in her an appreciation that he felt

to be sincere. "I don't see how a man can be kinder to a woman than

you are to me."

Well, kind was what he wanted to be; yet even while her charming

eyes rested on him with the truth of this he none the less had his

humour of honesty. "When I say suspense I mean, you know," he

laughed, "suspense about my own case too!"

"Oh yes--about your own case too!" It diminished his magnanimity,

but she only looked at him the more tenderly.

"Not, however," he went on, "that I want to talk to you about that.

It's my own little affair, and I mentioned it simply as part of

Mrs. Pocock's advantage." No, no; though there was a queer present

temptation in it, and his suspense was so real that to fidget was a

relief, he wouldn't talk to her about Mrs. Newsome, wouldn't work

off on her the anxiety produced in him by Sarah's calculated

omissions of reference. The effect she produced of representing her

mother had been produced--and that was just the immense, the

uncanny part of it--without her having so much as mentioned that

lady. She had brought no message, had alluded to no question, had

only answered his enquiries with hopeless limited propriety. She

had invented a way of meeting them--as if he had been a polite

perfunctory poor relation, of distant degree--that made them almost

ridiculous in him. He couldn't moreover on his own side ask much

without appearing to publish how he had lately lacked news;

a circumstance of which it was Sarah's profound policy not to betray

a suspicion. These things, all the same, he wouldn't breathe to

Madame de Vionnet--much as they might make him walk up and down.

And what he didn't say--as well as what SHE didn't, for she had

also her high decencies--enhanced the effect of his being there

with her at the end of ten minutes more intimately on the basis of

saving her than he had yet had occasion to be. It ended in fact by

being quite beautiful between them, the number of things they had a

manifest consciousness of not saying. He would have liked to turn

her, critically, to the subject of Mrs. Pocock, but he so stuck to

the line he felt to be the point of honour and of delicacy that he

scarce even asked her what her personal impression had been.

He knew it, for that matter, without putting her to trouble:

that she wondered how, with such elements, Sarah could still have

no charm, was one of the principal things she held her tongue about.

Strether would have been interested in her estimate of the elements--

indubitably there, some of them, and to be appraised according to

taste--but he denied himself even the luxury of this diversion. The

way Madame de Vionnet affected him to-day was in itself a kind of

demonstration of the happy employment of gifts. How could a woman

think Sarah had charm who struck one as having arrived at it

herself by such different roads? On the other hand of course Sarah

wasn't obliged to have it. He felt as if somehow Madame de Vionnet

WAS. The great question meanwhile was what Chad thought of his

sister; which was naturally ushered in by that of Sarah's

apprehension of Chad. THAT they could talk of, and with a freedom

purchased by their discretion in other senses. The difficulty

however was that they were reduced as yet to conjecture. He had

given them in the day or two as little of a lead as Sarah, and

Madame de Vionnet mentioned that she hadn't seen him since his

sister's arrival.

"And does that strike you as such an age?"

She met it in all honesty. "Oh I won't pretend I don't miss him.

Sometimes I see him every day. Our friendship's like that. Make

what you will of it!" she whimsically smiled; a little flicker of

the kind, occasional in her, that had more than once moved him to

wonder what he might best make of HER. "But he's perfectly right,"

she hastened to add, "and I wouldn't have him fail in any way at

present for the world. I'd sooner not see him for three months.

I begged him to be beautiful to them, and he fully feels it for

himself."

Strether turned away under his quick perception; she was so odd a

mixture of lucidity and mystery. She fell in at moments with the

theory about her he most cherished, and she seemed at others to

blow it into air. She spoke now as if her art were all an

innocence, and then again as if her innocence were all an art.

"Oh he's giving himself up, and he'll do so to the end. How can he

but want, now that it's within reach, his full impression?--which is

much more important, you know, than either yours or mine. But he's

just soaking," Strether said as he came back; "he's going in

conscientiously for a saturation. I'm bound to say he IS very good."

"Ah," she quietly replied, "to whom do you say it?" And then more

quietly still: "He's capable of anything."

Strether more than reaffirmed--"Oh he's excellent. I more and more

like," he insisted, "to see him with them;" though the oddity of

this tone between them grew sharper for him even while they spoke.

It placed the young man so before them as the result of her

interest and the product of her genius, acknowledged so her part in

the phenomenon and made the phenomenon so rare, that more than ever

yet he might have been on the very point of asking her for some

more detailed account of the whole business than he had yet

received from her. The occasion almost forced upon him some

question as to how she had managed and as to the appearance such

miracles presented from her own singularly close place of survey.

The moment in fact however passed, giving way to more present

history, and he continued simply to mark his appreciation of the

happy truth. "It's a tremendous comfort to feel how one can trust

him." And then again while for a little she said nothing--as if

after all to HER trust there might be a special limit: "I mean for

making a good show to them."

"Yes," she thoughtfully returned--"but if they shut their eyes

to it!"

Strether for an instant had his own thought. "Well perhaps that

won't matter!"

"You mean because he probably--do what they will--won't like them?"

"Oh 'do what they will'--! They won't do much; especially if Sarah

hasn't more--well, more than one has yet made out--to give."

Madame de Vionnet weighed it. "Ah she has all her grace!" It was a

statement over which, for a little, they could look at each other

sufficiently straight, and though it produced no protest from

Strether the effect was somehow as if he had treated it as a joke.

"She may be persuasive and caressing with him; she may be eloquent

beyond words. She may get hold of him," she wound up--"well, as

neither you nor I have."

"Yes, she MAY"--and now Strether smiled. "But he has spent all his

time each day with Jim. He's still showing Jim round."

She visibly wondered. "Then how about Jim?"

Strether took a turn before he answered. "Hasn't he given you Jim?

Hasn't he before this 'done' him for you?" He was a little at a

loss. "Doesn't he tell you things?"

She hesitated. "No"--and their eyes once more gave and took.

"Not as you do. You somehow make me see them--or at least feel them.

And I haven't asked too much," she added; "I've of late wanted so

not to worry him."

"Ah for that, so have I," he said with encouraging assent; so that--

as if she had answered everything--they were briefly sociable on it.

It threw him back on his other thought, with which he took another

turn; stopping again, however, presently with something of a glow.

"You see Jim's really immense. I think it will be Jim who'll do it."

She wondered. "Get hold of him?"

"No--just the other thing. Counteract Sarah's spell." And he

showed now, our friend, how far he had worked it out. "Jim's

intensely cynical."

"Oh dear Jim!" Madame de Vionnet vaguely smiled.

"Yes, literally--dear Jim! He's awful. What HE wants, heaven

forgive him, is to help us."

"You mean"--she was eager--"help ME?"

"Well, Chad and me in the first place. But he throws you in too,

though without as yet seeing you much. Only, so far as he does see

you--if you don't mind--he sees you as awful."

"'Awful'?"--she wanted it all.

"A regular bad one--though of course of a tremendously superior kind.

Dreadful, delightful, irresistible."

"Ah dear Jim! I should like to know him. I MUST."

"Yes, naturally. But will it do? You may, you know," Strether

suggested, "disappoint him."

She was droll and humble about it. "I can but try. But my

wickedness then," she went on, "is my recommendation for him?"

"Your wickedness and the charms with which, in such a degree as

yours, he associates it. He understands, you see, that Chad and I

have above all wanted to have a good time, and his view is simple

and sharp. Nothing will persuade him--in the light, that is, of my

behaviour--that I really didn't, quite as much as Chad, come over

to have one before it was too late. He wouldn't have expected it of

me; but men of my age, at Woollett--and especially the least likely

ones--have been noted as liable to strange outbreaks, belated

uncanny clutches at the unusual, the ideal. It's an effect that a

lifetime of Woollett has quite been observed as having; and I thus

give it to you, in Jim's view, for what it's worth. Now his wife

and his mother-in-law," Strether continued to explain, "have, as in

honour bound, no patience with such phenomena, late or early--which

puts Jim, as against his relatives, on the other side. Besides," he

added, "I don't think he really wants Chad back. If Chad doesn't

come--"

"He'll have"--Madame de Vionnet quite apprehended--"more of the

free hand?"

"Well, Chad's the bigger man."

"So he'll work now, en dessous, to keep him quiet?"

"No--he won't 'work' at all, and he won't do anything en dessous.

He's very decent and won't be a traitor in the camp. But he'll be

amused with his own little view of our duplicity, he'll sniff up

what he supposes to be Paris from morning till night, and he'll be,

as to the rest, for Chad--well, just what he is."

She thought it over. "A warning?"

He met it almost with glee. "You ARE as wonderful as everybody

says!" And then to explain all he meant: "I drove him about for his

first hour, and do you know what--all beautifully unconscious--he

most put before me? Why that something like THAT is at bottom, as

an improvement to his present state, as in fact the real redemption

of it, what they think it may not be too late to make of our

friend." With which, as, taking it in, she seemed, in her recurrent

alarm, bravely to gaze at the possibility, he completed his

statement. "But it IS too late. Thanks to you!"

It drew from her again one of her indefinite reflexions. "Oh 'me'--

after all!"

He stood before her so exhilarated by his demonstration that he

could fairly be jocular. "Everything's comparative. You're better

than THAT."

"You"--she could but answer him--"are better than anything." But

she had another thought. "WILL Mrs. Pocock come to me?"

"Oh yes--she'll do that. As soon, that is, as my friend Waymarsh--

HER friend now--leaves her leisure."

She showed an interest. "Is he so much her friend as that?"

"Why, didn't you see it all at the hotel?"

"Oh"--she was amused--"'all' is a good deal to say. I don't know--

I forget. I lost myself in HER."

"You were splendid," Strether returned--"but 'all' isn't a good

deal to say: it's only a little. Yet it's charming so far as it

goes. She wants a man to herself."

"And hasn't she got you?"

"Do you think she looked at me--or even at you--as if she had?"

Strether easily dismissed that irony. "Every one, you see, must

strike her as having somebody. You've got Chad--and Chad has

got you."

"I see"--she made of it what she could. "And you've got Maria."

Well, he on his side accepted that. "I've got Maria. And Maria has

got me. So it goes."

"But Mr. Jim--whom has he got?"

"Oh he has got--or it's as IF he had--the whole place."

"But for Mr. Waymarsh"--she recalled--"isn't Miss Barrace before

any one else?"

He shook his head. "Miss Barrace is a raffinee, and her amusement

won't lose by Mrs. Pocock. It will gain rather--especially if Sarah

triumphs and she comes in for a view of it."

"How well you know us!" Madame de Vionnet, at this, frankly sighed.

"No--it seems to me it's we that I know. I know Sarah--it's perhaps

on that ground only that my feet are firm. Waymarsh will take her

round while Chad takes Jim--and I shall be, I assure you delighted

for both of them. Sarah will have had what she requires--she will

have paid her tribute to the ideal; and he will have done about the

same. In Paris it's in the air--so what can one do less? If there's

a point that, beyond any other, Sarah wants to make, it's that she

didn't come out to be narrow. We shall feel at least that."

"Oh," she sighed, "the quantity we seem likely to 'feel'! But what

becomes, in these conditions, of the girl?"

"Of Mamie--if we're all provided? Ah for that," said Strether,

"you can trust Chad."

"To be, you mean, all right to her?"

"To pay her every attention as soon as he has polished off Jim.

He wants what Jim can give him--and what Jim really won't--though he

has had it all, and more than all, from me. He wants in short his

own personal impression, and he'll get it--strong. But as soon as

he has got it Mamie won't suffer."

"Oh Mamie mustn't SUFFER!" Madame de Vionnet soothingly emphasised.

But Strether could reassure her. "Don't fear. As soon as he has

done with Jim, Jim will fall to me. And then you'll see."

It was as if in a moment she saw already; yet she still waited.

Then "Is she really quite charming?" she asked.

He had got up with his last words and gathered in his hat and gloves.

"I don't know; I'm watching. I'm studying the case, as it were--

and I dare say I shall be able to tell you."

She wondered. "Is it a case?"

"Yes--I think so. At any rate I shall see.'

"But haven't you known her before?"

"Yes," he smiled--"but somehow at home she wasn't a case.

She has become one since." It was as if he made it out for himself.

"She has become one here."

"So very very soon?"

He measured it, laughing. "Not sooner than I did."

"And you became one--?"

"Very very soon. The day I arrived."

Her intelligent eyes showed her thought of it. "Ah but the day you

arrived you met Maria. Whom has Miss Pocock met?"

He paused again, but he brought it out. "Hasn't she met Chad?"

"Certainly--but not for the first time. He's an old friend." At

which Strether had a slow amused significant headshake that made

her go on: "You mean that for HER at least he's a new person--

that she sees him as different?"

"She sees him as different."

"And how does she see him?"

Strether gave it up. "How can one tell how a deep little girl sees

a deep young man?"

"Is every one so deep? Is she too?"

"So it strikes me deeper than I thought. But wait a little--between

us we'll make it out. You'll judge for that matter yourself."

Madame de Vionnet looked for the moment fairly bent on the chance.

"Then she WILL come with her?--I mean Mamie with Mrs. Pocock?"

"Certainly. Her curiosity, if nothing else, will in any case work

that. But leave it all to Chad."

"Ah," wailed Madame de Vionnet, turning away a little wearily, "the

things I leave to Chad!"

The tone of it made him look at her with a kindness that showed his

vision of her suspense. But he fell back on his confidence.

"Oh well--trust him. Trust him all the way." He had indeed no sooner

so spoken than the queer displacement of his point of view appeared

again to come up for him in the very sound, which drew from him a

short laugh, immediately checked. He became still more advisory.

"When they do come give them plenty of Miss Jeanne. Let Mamie see

her well."

She looked for a moment as if she placed them face to face.

"For Mamie to hate her?"

He had another of his corrective headshakes. "Mamie won't.

Trust THEM."

She looked at him hard, and then as if it were what she must always

come back to: "It's you I trust. But I was sincere," she said, "at

the hotel. I did, I do, want my child--"

"Well?"--Strether waited with deference while she appeared to hesitate

as to how to put it.

"Well, to do what she can for me."

Strether for a little met her eyes on it; after which something

that might have been unexpected to her came from him. "Poor little

duck!"

Not more expected for himself indeed might well have been her echo

of it. "Poor little duck! But she immensely wants herself," she

said, "to see our friend's cousin."

"Is that what she thinks her?"

"It's what we call the young lady."

He thought again; then with a laugh: "Well, your daughter will

help you."

And now at last he took leave of her, as he had been intending for

five minutes. But she went part of the way with him, accompanying

him out of the room and into the next and the next. Her noble old

apartment offered a succession of three, the first two of which

indeed, on entering, smaller than the last, but each with its faded

and formal air, enlarged the office of the antechamber and enriched

the sense of approach. Strether fancied them, liked them, and,

passing through them with her more slowly now, met a sharp renewal

of his original impression. He stopped, he looked back; the whole

thing made a vista, which he found high melancholy and sweet--full,

once more, of dim historic shades, of the faint faraway cannon-roar

of the great Empire. It was doubtless half the projection of his

mind, but his mind was a thing that, among old waxed parquets, pale

shades of pink and green, pseudo-classic candelabra, he had always

needfully to reckon with. They could easily make him irrelevant.

The oddity, the originality, the poetry--he didn't know what to

call it--of Chad's connexion reaffirmed for him its romantic side.

"They ought to see this, you know. They MUST."

"The Pococks?"--she looked about in deprecation; she seemed to see

gaps he didn't.

"Mamie and Sarah--Mamie in particular."

"My shabby old place? But THEIR things--!"

"Oh their things! You were talking of what will do something for

you--"

"So that it strikes you," she broke in, "that my poor place may?

Oh," she ruefully mused, "that WOULD be desperate!"

"Do you know what I wish?" he went on. "I wish Mrs. Newsome herself

could have a look."

She stared, missing a little his logic. "It would make a

difference?"

Her tone was so earnest that as he continued to look about he

laughed. "It might!"

"But you've told her, you tell me--"

"All about you? Yes, a wonderful story. But there's all the

indescribable--what one gets only on the spot."

"Thank you!" she charmingly and sadly smiled.

"It's all about me here," he freely continued. "Mrs. Newsome feels

things."

But she seemed doomed always to come back to doubt. "No one feels

so much as YOU. No--not any one."

"So much the worse then for every one. It's very easy."

They were by this time in the antechamber, still alone together, as

she hadn't rung for a servant. The antechamber was high and square,

grave and suggestive too, a little cold and slippery even in

summer, and with a few old prints that were precious, Strether

divined, on the walls. He stood in the middle, slightly lingering,

vaguely directing his glasses, while, leaning against the door-post

of the room, she gently pressed her cheek to the side of the

recess. "YOU would have been a friend."

"I?"--it startled him a little.

"For the reason you say. You're not stupid." And then abruptly, as

if bringing it out were somehow founded on that fact:

"We're marrying Jeanne."

It affected him on the spot as a move in a game, and he was even

then not without the sense that that wasn't the way Jeanne should

be married. But he quickly showed his interest, though--as quickly

afterwards struck him--with an absurd confusion of mind. "'You'?

You and--a--not Chad?" Of course it was the child's father who made

the 'we,' but to the child's father it would have cost him an

effort to allude. Yet didn't it seem the next minute that Monsieur

de Vionnet was after all not in question?--since she had gone on to

say that it was indeed to Chad she referred and that he had been in

the whole matter kindness itself.

"If I must tell you all, it is he himself who has put us in the

way. I mean in the way of an opportunity that, so far as I can yet

see, is all I could possibly have dreamed of. For all the trouble

Monsieur de Vionnet will ever take!" It was the first time she had

spoken to him of her husband, and he couldn't have expressed how

much more intimate with her it suddenly made him feel. It wasn't

much, in truth--there were other things in what she was saying that

were far more; but it was as if, while they stood there together so

easily in these cold chambers of the past, the single touch had

shown the reach of her confidence. "But our friend," she asked,

"hasn't then told you?"

"He has told me nothing."

"Well, it has come with rather a rush--all in a very few days; and

hasn't moreover yet taken a form that permits an announcement. It's

only for you--absolutely you alone--that I speak; I so want you to

know." The sense he had so often had, since the first hour of his

disembarkment, of being further and further "in," treated him again

at this moment to another twinge; but in this wonderful way of her

putting him in there continued to be something exquisitely

remorseless. "Monsieur de Vionnet will accept what he MUST accept.

He has proposed half a dozen things--each one more impossible than

the other; and he wouldn't have found this if he lives to a hundred.

Chad found it," she continued with her lighted, faintly flushed,

her conscious confidential face, "in the quietest way in the world.

Or rather it found HIM--for everything finds him; I mean finds

him right. You'll think we do such things strangely--but at my age,"

she smiled, "one has to accept one's conditions. Our young man's people

had seen her; one of his sisters, a charming woman--we know all

about them--had observed her somewhere with me. She had spoken

to her brother--turned him on; and we were again observed, poor Jeanne

and I, without our in the least knowing it. It was at the beginning

of the winter; it went on for some time; it outlasted our absence; it

began again on our return; and it luckily seems all right. The

young man had met Chad, and he got a friend to approach him--as

having a decent interest in us. Mr. Newsome looked well before he

leaped; he kept beautifully quiet and satisfied himself fully; then

only he spoke. It's what has for some time past occupied us. It

seems as if it were what would do; really, really all one could

wish. There are only two or three points to be settled--they depend

on her father. But this time I think we're safe."

Strether, consciously gaping a little, had fairly hung upon her

lips. "I hope so with all my heart." And then he permitted himself:

"Does nothing depend on HER?"

"Ah naturally; everything did. But she's pleased comme tout. She

has been perfectly free; and he--our young friend--is really a

combination. I quite adore him."

Strether just made sure. "You mean your future son-in-law?"

"Future if we all bring it off."

"Ah well," said Strether decorously, "I heartily hope you may."

There seemed little else for him to say, though her communication

had the oddest effect on him. Vaguely and confusedly he was

troubled by it; feeling as if he had even himself been concerned in

something deep and dim. He had allowed for depths, but these were

greater: and it was as if, oppressively--indeed absurdly--he was

responsible for what they had now thrown up to the surface. It was--

through something ancient and cold in it--what he would have

called the real thing. In short his hostess's news, though he

couldn't have explained why, was a sensible shock, and his

oppression a weight he felt he must somehow or other immediately

get rid of. There were too many connexions missing to make it

tolerable he should do anything else. He was prepared to suffer--

before his own inner tribunal--for Chad; he was prepared to suffer

even for Madame de Vionnet. But he wasn't prepared to suffer for

the little girl So now having said the proper thing, he wanted to

get away. She held him an instant, however, with another appeal.

"Do I seem to you very awful?"

"Awful? Why so?" But he called it to himself, even as he spoke, his

biggest insincerity yet.

"Our arrangements are so different from yours."

"Mine?" Oh he could dismiss that too! "I haven't any arrangements."

"Then you must accept mine; all the more that they're excellent.

They're founded on a vieille sagesse. There will be much more, if

all goes well, for you to hear and to know, and everything, believe

me, for you to like. Don't be afraid; you'll be satisfied." Thus

she could talk to him of what, of her innermost life--for that was

what it came to--he must "accept"; thus she could extraordinarily

speak as if in such an affair his being satisfied had an

importance. It was all a wonder and made the whole case larger. He

had struck himself at the hotel, before Sarah and Waymarsh, as

being in her boat; but where on earth was he now? This question was

in the air till her own lips quenched it with another. "And do you

suppose HE--who loves her so--would do anything reckless or cruel?"

He wondered what he supposed. "Do you mean your young man--?"

"I mean yours. I mean Mr. Newsome." It flashed for Strether the

next moment a finer light, and the light deepened as she went on.

"He takes, thank God, the truest tenderest interest in her."

It deepened indeed. "Oh I'm sure of that!"

"You were talking," she said, "about one's trusting him. You see

then how I do."

He waited a moment--it all came. "I see--I see." He felt he really

did see.

"He wouldn't hurt her for the world, nor--assuming she marries at

all--risk anything that might make against her happiness. And--

willingly, at least--he would never hurt ME."

Her face, with what he had by this time grasped, told him more than

her words; whether something had come into it, or whether he only read

clearer, her whole story--what at least he then took for such--reached

out to him from it. With the initiative she now attributed to Chad

it all made a sense, and this sense--a light, a lead, was what had

abruptly risen before him. He wanted, once more, to get off with

these things; which was at last made easy, a servant having, for

his assistance, on hearing voices in the hall, just come forward.

All that Strether had made out was, while the man opened the door

and impersonally waited, summed up in his last word. "I don't

think, you know, Chad will tell me anything."

"No--perhaps not yet."

"And I won't as yet speak to him."

"Ah that's as you'll think best. You must judge."

She had finally given him her hand, which he held a moment. "How

MUCH I have to judge!"

"Everything," said Madame de Vionnet: a remark that was indeed--

with the refined disguised suppressed passion of her face--what he

most carried away.

II

So far as a direct approach was concerned Sarah had neglected him,

for the week now about to end, with a civil consistency of chill

that, giving him a higher idea of her social resource, threw him

back on the general reflexion that a woman could always be amazing.

It indeed helped a little to console him that he felt sure she had

for the same period also left Chad's curiosity hanging; though on

the other hand, for his personal relief, Chad could at least go

through the various motions--and he made them extraordinarily

numerous--of seeing she had a good time. There wasn't a motion on

which, in her presence, poor Strether could so much as venture, and

all he could do when he was out of it was to walk over for a talk

with Maria. He walked over of course much less than usual, but he

found a special compensation in a certain half-hour during which,

toward the close of a crowded empty expensive day, his several

companions seemed to him so disposed of as to give his forms and

usages a rest. He had been with them in the morning and had

nevertheless called on the Pococks in the afternoon; but their

whole group, he then found, had dispersed after a fashion of which

it would amuse Miss Gostrey to hear. He was sorry again, gratefully

sorry she was so out of it--she who had really put him in; but she

had fortunately always her appetite for news. The pure flame of the

disinterested burned in her cave of treasures as a lamp in a

Byzantine vault. It was just now, as happened, that for so fine a

sense as hers a near view would have begun to pay. Within three

days, precisely, the situation on which he was to report had shown

signs of an equilibrium; the effect of his look in at the hotel was

to confirm this appearance. If the equilibrium might only prevail!

Sarah was out with Waymarsh, Mamie was out with Chad, and Jim was

out alone. Later on indeed he himself was booked to Jim, was to

take him that evening to the Varieties--which Strether was careful

to pronounce as Jim pronounced them.

Miss Gostrey drank it in. "What then to-night do the others do?"

"Well, it has been arranged. Waymarsh takes Sarah to dine at

Bignons.

She wondered. "And what do they do after? They can't come straight

home."

"No, they can't come straight home--at least Sarah can't.

It's their secret, but I think I've guessed it." Then as she waited:

"The circus."

It made her stare a moment longer, then laugh almost to

extravagance. "There's no one like you!"

"Like ME?"--he only wanted to understand.

"Like all of you together--like all of us: Woollett, Milrose and

their products. We're abysmal--but may we never be less so!

Mr. Newsome," she continued, "meanwhile takes Miss Pocock--?"

"Precisely--to the Francais: to see what you took Waymarsh and me

to, a family-bill."

"Ah then may Mr. Chad enjoy it as I did!" But she saw so much in

things. "Do they spend their evenings, your young people, like

that, alone together?"

"Well, they're young people--but they're old friends."

"I see, I see. And do THEY dine--for a difference--at Brebant's?"

"Oh where they dine is their secret too. But I've my idea that it

will be, very quietly, at Chad's own place."

"She'll come to him there alone?"

They looked at each other a moment. "He has known her from a child.

Besides," said Strether with emphasis, "Mamie's remarkable. She's

splendid."

She wondered. "Do you mean she expects to bring it off?"

"Getting hold of him? No--I think not."

"She doesn't want him enough?--or doesn't believe in her power?"

On which as he said nothing she continued: "She finds she doesn't

care for him?"

"No--I think she finds she does. But that's what I mean by so

describing her. It's IF she does that she's splendid. But we'll

see," he wound up, "where she comes out."

"You seem to show me sufficiently," Miss Gostrey laughed, "where

she goes in! But is her childhood's friend," she asked, "permitting

himself recklessly to flirt with her?"

"No--not that. Chad's also splendid. They're ALL splendid!" he

declared with a sudden strange sound of wistfulness and envy.

"They're at least HAPPY."

"Happy?"--it appeared, with their various difficulties, to surprise

her.

"Well--I seem to myself among them the only one who isn't."

She demurred. "With your constant tribute to the ideal?"

He had a laugh at his tribute to the ideal, but he explained after

a moment his impression. "I mean they're living. They're rushing

about. I've already had my rushing. I'm waiting."

"But aren't you," she asked by way of cheer, "waiting with ME?"

He looked at her in all kindness. "Yes--if it weren't for that!"

"And you help me to wait," she said. "However," she went on, "I've

really something for you that will help you to wait and which you

shall have in a minute. Only there's something more I want from you

first. I revel in Sarah."

"So do I. If it weren't," he again amusedly sighed, "for THAT--!"

"Well, you owe more to women than any man I ever saw. We do seem to

keep you going. Yet Sarah, as I see her, must be great,"

"She IS "Strether fully assented: "great! Whatever happens, she

won't, with these unforgettable days, have lived in vain."

Miss Gostrey had a pause. "You mean she has fallen in love?"

"I mean she wonders if she hasn't--and it serves all her purpose."

"It has indeed," Maria laughed, "served women's purposes before!"

"Yes--for giving in. But I doubt if the idea--as an idea--has ever

up to now answered so well for holding out. That's HER tribute to

the ideal--we each have our own. It's her romance--and it seems to

me better on the whole than mine. To have it in Paris too," he

explained--"on this classic ground, in this charged infectious air,

with so sudden an intensity: well, it's more than she expected. She

has had in short to recognise the breaking out for her of a real

affinity--and with everything to enhance the drama."

Miss Gostrey followed. "Jim for instance?"

"Jim. Jim hugely enhances. Jim was made to enhance. And then

Mr. Waymarsh. It's the crowning touch--it supplies the colour.

He's positively separated."

"And she herself unfortunately isn't--that supplies the colour

too." Miss Gostrey was all there. But somehow--! "Is HE in love?"

Strether looked at her a long time; then looked all about the room;

then came a little nearer. "Will you never tell any one in the

world as long as ever you live?"

"Never." It was charming.

"He thinks Sarah really is. But he has no fear," Strether hastened

to add.

"Of her being affected by it?"

"Of HIS being. He likes it, but he knows she can hold out. He's

helping her, he's floating her over, by kindness."

Maria rather funnily considered it. "Floating her over in

champagne? The kindness of dining her, nose to nose, at the hour

when all Paris is crowding to profane delights, and in the--well,

in the great temple, as one hears of it, of pleasure?"

"That's just IT, for both of them," Strether insisted--"and all of

a supreme innocence. The Parisian place, the feverish hour, the

putting before her of a hundred francs' worth of food and drink,

which they'll scarcely touch--all that's the dear man's own

romance; the expensive kind, expensive in francs and centimes, in

which he abounds. And the circus afterwards--which is cheaper, but

which he'll find some means of making as dear as possible--that's

also HIS tribute to the ideal. It does for him. He'll see her

through. They won't talk of anything worse than you and me."

"Well, we're bad enough perhaps, thank heaven," she laughed. "to

upset them! Mr. Waymarsh at any rate is a hideous old coquette."

And the next moment she had dropped everything for a different

pursuit. "What you don't appear to know is that Jeanne de Vionnet

has become engaged. She's to marry--it has been definitely

arranged--young Monsieur de Montbron."

He fairly blushed. "Then--if you know it--it's 'out'?"

"Don't I often know things that are NOT out? However," she said,

"this will be out to-morrow. But I see I've counted too much on

your possible ignorance. You've been before me, and I don't make

you jump as I hoped."

He gave a gasp at her insight. "You never fail! I've HAD my jump.

I had it when I first heard."

"Then if you knew why didn't you tell me as soon as you came in?"

"Because I had it from her as a thing not yet to be spoken of."

Miss Gostrey wondered. "From Madame de Vionnet herself?"

"As a probability--not quite a certainty: a good cause in which

Chad has been working. So I've waited."

"You need wait no longer," she returned. "It reached me yesterday--

roundabout and accidental, but by a person who had had it from one

of the young man's own people--as a thing quite settled. I was only

keeping it for you."

"You thought Chad wouldn't have told me?"

She hesitated. "Well, if he hasn't--"

"He hasn't. And yet the thing appears to have been practically his

doing. So there we are."

"There we are!" Maria candidly echoed.

"That's why I jumped. I jumped," he continued to explain, "because

it means, this disposition of the daughter, that there's now

nothing else: nothing else but him and the mother."

"Still--it simplifies."

"It simplifies"--he fully concurred. "But that's precisely where we

are. It marks a stage in his relation. The act is his answer to

Mrs. Newsome's demonstration."

"It tells," Maria asked, "the worst?"

"The worst."

"But is the worst what he wants Sarah to know?"

"He doesn't care for Sarah."

At which Miss Gostrey's eyebrows went up. "You mean she has already

dished herself?"

Strether took a turn about; he had thought it out again and again

before this, to the end; but the vista seemed each time longer. "He

wants his good friend to know the best. I mean the measure of his

attachment. She asked for a sign, and he thought of that one. There

it is."

"A concession to her jealousy?"

Strether pulled up. "Yes--call it that. Make it lurid--for that

makes my problem richer."

"Certainly, let us have it lurid--for I quite agree with you that

we want none of our problems poor. But let us also have it clear.

Can he, in the midst of such a preoccupation, or on the heels of

it, have seriously cared for Jeanne?--cared, I mean, as a young man

at liberty would have cared?"

Well, Strether had mastered it. "I think he can have thought it

would be charming if he COULD care. It would be nicer."

"Nicer than being tied up to Marie?"

"Yes--than the discomfort of an attachment to a person he can never

hope, short of a catastrophe, to marry. And he was quite right,"

said Strether. "It would certainly have been nicer. Even when a

thing's already nice there mostly is some other thing that would

have been nicer--or as to which we wonder if it wouldn't. But his

question was all the same a dream. He COULDn't care in that way. He

IS tied up to Marie. The relation is too special and has gone too

far. It's the very basis, and his recent lively contribution toward

establishing Jeanne in life has been his definite and final

acknowledgement to Madame de Vionnet that he has ceased squirming.

I doubt meanwhile," he went on, "if Sarah has at all directly

attacked him."

His companion brooded. "But won't he wish for his own satisfaction

to make his ground good to her?"

"No--he'll leave it to me, he'll leave everything to me. I 'sort

of' feel"--he worked it out--"that the whole thing will come upon

me. Yes, I shall have every inch and every ounce of it. I shall be

USED for it--!" And Strether lost himself in the prospect. Then he

fancifully expressed the issue. "To the last drop of my blood."

Maria, however, roundly protested. "Ah you'll please keep a drop

for ME. I shall have a use for it!"--which she didn't however

follow up. She had come back the next moment to another matter.

"Mrs. Pocock, with her brother, is trusting only to her general

charm?"

"So it would seem."

"And the charm's not working?"

Well, Strether put it otherwise, "She's sounding the note of home--

which is the very best thing she can do."

"The best for Madame de Vionnet?"

"The best for home itself. The natural one; the right one."

"Right," Maria asked, "when it fails?"

Strether had a pause. "The difficulty's Jim. Jim's the note of

home."

She debated. "Ah surely not the note of Mrs. Newsome."

But he had it all. "The note of the home for which Mrs. Newsome

wants him--the home of the business. Jim stands, with his little

legs apart, at the door of THAT tent; and Jim is, frankly speaking,

extremely awful."

Maria stared. "And you in, you poor thing, for your evening with

him?"

"Oh he's all right for ME!" Strether laughed. "Any one's good

enough for ME. But Sarah shouldn't, all the same, have brought him.

She doesn't appreciate him."

His friend was amused with this statement of it. "Doesn't know, you

mean, how bad he is?"

Strether shook his head with decision. "Not really."

She wondered. "Then doesn't Mrs. Newsome?"

It made him frankly do the same. "Well, no--since you ask me."

Maria rubbed it in. "Not really either?"

"Not at all. She rates him rather high." With which indeed,

immediately, he took himself up. "Well, he IS good too, in his way.

It depends on what you want him for."

Miss Gostrey, however, wouldn't let it depend on anything--wouldn't

have it, and wouldn't want him, at any price. "It suits my book,"

she said, "that he should be impossible; and it suits it still

better," she more imaginatively added, "that Mrs. Newsome doesn't

know he is."

Strether, in consequence, had to take it from her, but he fell back

on something else. "I'll tell you who does really know."

"Mr. Waymarsh? Never!"

"Never indeed. I'm not ALWAYS thinking of Mr. Waymarsh; in fact I

find now I never am." Then he mentioned the person as if there were

a good deal in it. "Mamie."

"His own sister?" Oddly enough it but let her down. "What good will

that do?"

"None perhaps. But there--as usual--we are!"

III

There they were yet again, accordingly, for two days more; when

Strether, on being, at Mrs. Pocock's hotel, ushered into that

lady's salon, found himself at first assuming a mistake on the part

of the servant who had introduced him and retired. The occupants

hadn't come in, for the room looked empty as only a room can look

in Paris, of a fine afternoon when the faint murmur of the huge

collective life, carried on out of doors, strays among scattered

objects even as a summer air idles in a lonely garden. Our friend

looked about and hesitated; observed, on the evidence of a table

charged with purchases and other matters, that Sarah had become

possessed--by no aid from HIM--of the last number of the

salmon-coloured Revue; noted further that Mamie appeared to have

received a present of Fromentin's "Maitres d'Autrefois" from Chad,

who had written her name on the cover; and pulled up at the sight of

a heavy letter addressed in a hand he knew. This letter, forwarded

by a banker and arriving in Mrs. Pocock's absence, had been placed

in evidence, and it drew from the fact of its being unopened a sudden

queer power to intensify the reach of its author. It brought home

to him the scale on which Mrs. Newsome--for she had been copious

indeed this time--was writing to her daughter while she kept HIM in

durance; and it had altogether such an effect upon him as made him

for a few minutes stand still and breathe low. In his own room, at

his own hotel, he had dozens of well-filled envelopes superscribed

in that character; and there was actually something in the renewal

of his interrupted vision of the character that played straight

into the so frequent question of whether he weren't already

disinherited beyond appeal. It was such an assurance as the sharp

downstrokes of her pen hadn't yet had occasion to give him; but

they somehow at the present crisis stood for a probable

absoluteness in any decree of the writer. He looked at Sarah's name

and address, in short, as if he had been looking hard into her

mother's face, and then turned from it as if the face had declined

to relax. But since it was in a manner as if Mrs. Newsome were

thereby all the more, instead of the less, in the room, and were

conscious, sharply and sorely conscious, of himself, so he felt

both held and hushed, summoned to stay at least and take his

punishment. By staying, accordingly, he took it--creeping softly

and vaguely about and waiting for Sarah to come in. She WOULD come

in if he stayed long enough, and he had now more than ever the

sense of her success in leaving him a prey to anxiety. It wasn't to

be denied that she had had a happy instinct, from the point of view

of Woollett, in placing him thus at the mercy of her own initiative.

It was very well to try to say he didn't care--that she might

break ground when she would, might never break it at all if she

wouldn't, and that he had no confession whatever to wait upon her

with: he breathed from day to day an air that damnably required

clearing, and there were moments when he quite ached to precipitate

that process. He couldn't doubt that, should she only oblige him by

surprising him just as he then was, a clarifying scene of some sort

would result from the concussion.

He humbly circulated in this spirit till he suddenly had a fresh

arrest. Both the windows of the room stood open to the balcony, but

it was only now that, in the glass of the leaf of one of them,

folded back, he caught a reflexion quickly recognised as the colour

of a lady's dress. Somebody had been then all the while on the

balcony, and the person, whoever it might be, was so placed between

the windows as to be hidden from him; while on the other hand the

many sounds of the street had covered his own entrance and

movements. If the person were Sarah he might on the spot therefore

be served to his taste. He might lead her by a move or two up to

the remedy for his vain tension; as to which, should he get nothing

else from it, he would at least have the relief of pulling down the

roof on their heads. There was fortunately no one at hand to

observe--in respect to his valour--that even on this completed

reasoning he still hung fire. He had been waiting for Mrs. Pocock

and the sound of the oracle; but he had to gird himself afresh--

which he did in the embrasure of the window, neither advancing nor

retreating--before provoking the revelation. It was apparently for

Sarah to come more into view; he was in that case there at her

service. She did however, as meanwhile happened, come more into

view; only she luckily came at the last minute as a contradiction

of Sarah. The occupant of the balcony was after all quite another

person, a person presented, on a second look, by a charming back

and a slight shift of her position, as beautiful brilliant

unconscious Mamie--Mamie alone at home, Mamie passing her time in

her own innocent way, Mamie in short rather shabbily used, but

Mamie absorbed interested and interesting. With her arms on the

balustrade and her attention dropped to the street she allowed

Strether to watch her, to consider several things, without her

turning round.

But the oddity was that when he HAD so watched and considered he

simply stepped back into the room without following up his

advantage. He revolved there again for several minutes, quite as

with something new to think of and as if the bearings of the

possibility of Sarah had been superseded. For frankly, yes, it HAD

bearings thus to find the girl in solitary possession. There was

something in it that touched him to a point not to have been

reckoned beforehand, something that softly but quite pressingly

spoke to him, and that spoke the more each time he paused again at

the edge of the balcony and saw her still unaware. Her companions

were plainly scattered; Sarah would be off somewhere with Waymarsh

and Chad off somewhere with Jim. Strether didn't at all mentally

impute to Chad that he was with his "good friend"; he gave him the

benefit of supposing him involved in appearances that, had he had

to describe them--for instance to Maria--he would have conveniently

qualified as more subtle. It came to him indeed the next thing that

there was perhaps almost an excess of refinement in having left

Mamie in such weather up there alone; however she might in fact

have extemporised, under the charm of the Rue de Rivoli, a little

makeshift Paris of wonder arid fancy. Our friend in any case now

recognised--and it was as if at the recognition Mrs. Newsome's

fixed intensity had suddenly, with a deep audible gasp, grown thin

and vague--that day after day he had been conscious in respect to

his young lady of something odd and ambiguous, yet something into

which he could at last read a meaning. It had been at the most,

this mystery, an obsession--oh an obsession agreeable; and it had

just now fallen into its place as at the touch of a spring. It had

represented the possibility between them of some communication

baffled by accident and delay--the possibility even of some

relation as yet unacknowledged.

There was always their old relation, the fruit of the Woollett

years; but that--and it was what was strangest--had nothing

whatever in common with what was now in the air. As a child, as a

"bud," and then again as a flower of expansion, Mamie had bloomed

for him, freely, in the almost incessantly open doorways of home;

where he remembered her as first very forward, as then very

backward--for he had carried on at one period, in Mrs. Newsome's

parlours (oh Mrs. Newsome's phases and his own!) a course of

English Literature re-enforced by exams and teas--and once more,

finally, as very much in advance. But he had kept no great sense of

points of contact; it not being in the nature of things at Woollett

that the freshest of the buds should find herself in the same

basket with the most withered of the winter apples. The child had

given sharpness, above all, to his sense of the flight of time; it

was but the day before yesterday that he had tripped up on her

hoop, yet his experience of remarkable women--destined, it would

seem, remarkably to grow--felt itself ready this afternoon, quite

braced itself, to include her. She had in fine more to say to him

than he had ever dreamed the pretty girl of the moment COULD have;

and the proof of the circumstance was that, visibly, unmistakeably,

she had been able to say it to no one else. It was something she

could mention neither to her brother, to her sister-in-law nor to

Chad; though he could just imagine that had she still been at home

she might have brought it out, as a supreme tribute to age,

authority and attitude, for Mrs. Newsome. It was moreover something

in which they all took an interest; the strength of their interest

was in truth just the reason of her prudence. All this then, for

five minutes, was vivid to Strether, and it put before him that,

poor child, she had now but her prudence to amuse her. That, for a

pretty girl in Paris, struck him, with a rush, as a sorry state; so

that under the impression he went out to her with a step as

hypocritically alert, he was well aware, as if he had just come

into the room. She turned with a start at his voice; preoccupied

with him though she might be, she was just a scrap disappointed.

"Oh I thought you were Mr. Bilham!"

The remark had been at first surprising and our friend's private

thought, under the influence of it, temporarily blighted; yet we

are able to add that he presently recovered his inward tone and

that many a fresh flower of fancy was to bloom in the same air.

Little Bilham--since little Bilham was, somewhat incongruously,

expected--appeared behindhand; a circumstance by which Strether was

to profit. They came back into the room together after a little,

the couple on the balcony, and amid its crimson-and-gold elegance,

with the others still absent, Strether passed forty minutes that he

appraised even at the time as far, in the whole queer connexion,

from his idlest. Yes indeed, since he had the other day so agreed

with Maria about the inspiration of the lurid, here was something

for his problem that surely didn't make it shrink and that was

floated in upon him as part of a sudden flood. He was doubtless not

to know till afterwards, on turning them over in thought, of how

many elements his impression was composed; but he none the less

felt, as he sat with the charming girl, the signal growth of a

confidence. For she WAS charming, when all was said--and none the

less so for the visible habit and practice of freedom and fluency.

She was charming, he was aware, in spite of the fact that if he

hadn't found her so he would have found her something he should

have been in peril of expressing as "funny." Yes, she was funny,

wonderful Mamie, and without dreaming it; she was bland, she was

bridal--with never, that he could make out as yet, a bridegroom to

support it; she was handsome and portly and easy and chatty, soft

and sweet and almost disconcertingly reassuring. She was dressed,

if we might so far discriminate, less as a young lady than as an

old one--had an old one been supposable to Strether as so committed

to vanity; the complexities of her hair missed moreover also the

looseness of youth; and she had a mature manner of bending a

little, as to encourage and reward, while she held neatly together

in front of her a pair of strikingly polished hands: the

combination of all of which kept up about her the glamour of her

"receiving," placed her again perpetually between the windows and

within sound of the ice-cream plates, suggested the enumeration of

all the names, all the Mr. Brookses and Mr. Snookses, gregarious

specimens of a single type. she was happy to "meet." But if all

this was where she was funny, and if what was funnier than the rest

was the contrast between her beautiful benevolent patronage--such a

hint of the polysyllabic as might make her something of a bore

toward middle age--and her rather flat little voice, the voice,

naturally, unaffectedly yet, of a girl of fifteen; so Strether,

none the less, at the end of ten minutes, felt in her a quiet

dignity that pulled things bravely together. If quiet dignity,

almost more than matronly, with voluminous, too voluminous clothes,

was the effect she proposed to produce, that was an ideal one could

like in her when once one had got into relation. The great thing

now for her visitor was that this was exactly what he had done; it

made so extraordinary a mixture of the brief and crowded hour. It

was the mark of a relation that he had begun so quickly to find

himself sure she was, of all people, as might have been said, on

the side and of the party of Mrs. Newsome's original ambassador.

She was in HIS interest and not in Sarah's, and some sign of that

was precisely what he had been feeling in her, these last days, as

imminent. Finally placed, in Paris, in immediate presence of the

situation and of the hero of it--by whom Strether was incapable of

meaning any one but Chad--she had accomplished, and really in a

manner all unexpected to herself, a change of base; deep still

things had come to pass within her, and by the time she had grown

sure of them Strether had become aware of the little drama. When

she knew where she was, in short, he had made it out; and he made

it out at present still better; though with never a direct word

passing between them all the while on the subject of his own

predicament. There had been at first, as he sat there with her, a

moment during which he wondered if she meant to break ground in

respect to his prime undertaking. That door stood so strangely ajar

that he was half-prepared to be conscious, at any juncture, of her

having, of any one's having, quite bounced in. But, friendly,

familiar, light of touch and happy of tact, she exquisitely stayed

out; so that it was for all the world as if to show she could deal

with him without being reduced to--well, scarcely anything.

It fully came up for them then, by means of their talking of

everything BUT Chad, that Mamie, unlike Sarah, unlike Jim, knew

perfectly what had become of him. It fully came up that she had

taken to the last fraction of an inch the measure of the change in

him, and that she wanted Strether to know what a secret she

proposed to make of it. They talked most conveniently--as if they

had had no chance yet--about Woollett; and that had virtually the

effect of their keeping the secret more close. The hour took on for

Strether, little by little, a queer sad sweetness of quality, he

had such a revulsion in Mamie's favour and on behalf of her social

value as might have come from remorse at some early injustice. She

made him, as under the breath of some vague western whiff, homesick

and freshly restless; he could really for the time have fancied

himself stranded with her on a far shore, during an ominous calm,

in a quaint community of shipwreck. Their little interview was like

a picnic on a coral strand; they passed each other, with melancholy

smiles and looks sufficiently allusive, such cupfuls of water as

they had saved. Especially sharp in Strether meanwhile was the

conviction that his companion really knew, as we have hinted, where

she had come out. It was at a very particular place--only THAT she

would never tell him; it would be above all what he should have to

puzzle for himself. This was what he hoped for, because his interest

in the girl wouldn't be complete without it. No more would the

appreciation to which she was entitled--so assured was he that

the more he saw of her process the more he should see of her pride.

She saw, herself, everything; but she knew what she didn't want,

and that it was that had helped her. What didn't she want?--there

was a pleasure lost for her old friend in not yet knowing, as there

would doubtless be a thrill in getting a glimpse. Gently and

sociably she kept that dark to him, and it was as if she soothed

and beguiled him in other ways to make up for it. She came out with

her impression of Madame de Vionnet--of whom she had "heard so

much"; she came out with her impression of Jeanne, whom she had

been "dying to see": she brought it out with a blandness by which

her auditor was really stirred that she had been with Sarah early

that very afternoon, and after dreadful delays caused by all sorts

of things, mainly, eternally, by the purchase of clothes--clothes

that unfortunately wouldn't be themselves eternal--to call in the

Rue de Bellechasse.

At the sound of these names Strether almost blushed to feel that he

couldn't have sounded them first--and yet couldn't either have

justified his squeamishness. Mamie made them easy as he couldn't

have begun to do, and yet it could only have cost her more than he

should ever have had to spend. It was as friends of Chad's, friends

special, distinguished, desirable, enviable, that she spoke of

them, and she beautifully carried it off that much as she had heard

of them--though she didn't say how or where, which was a touch of

her own--she had found them beyond her supposition. She abounded in

praise of them, and after the manner of Woollett--which made the

manner of Woollett a loveable thing again to Strether. He had never

so felt the true inwardness of it as when his blooming companion

pronounced the elder of the ladies of the Rue de Bellechasse too

fascinating for words and declared of the younger that she was

perfectly ideal, a real little monster of charm. "Nothing," she said

of Jeanne, "ought ever to happen to her--she's so awfully right as

she is. Another touch will spoil her--so she oughtn't to BE touched."

"Ah but things, here in Paris," Strether observed, "do happen to

little girls." And then for the joke's and the occasion's sake:

"Haven't you found that yourself?"

"That things happen--? Oh I'm not a little girl. I'm a big

battered blowsy one. I don't care," Mamie laughed, "WHAT happens."

Strether had a pause while he wondered if it mightn't happen that

he should give her the pleasure of learning that he found her nicer

than he had really dreamed--a pause that ended when he had said to

himself that, so far as it at all mattered for her, she had in fact

perhaps already made this out. He risked accordingly a different

question--though conscious, as soon as he had spoken, that he

seemed to place it in relation to her last speech. "But that

Mademoiselle de Vionnet is to be married--I suppose you've heard of

THAT."

For all, he then found, he need fear! "Dear, yes; the gentleman

was there: Monsieur de Montbron, whom Madame de Vionnet

presented to us."

"And was he nice?"

Mamie bloomed and bridled with her best reception manner. "Any

man's nice when he's in love."

It made Strether laugh. "But is Monsieur de Montbron in love--

already--with YOU?"

"Oh that's not necessary--it's so much better he should be so with

HER: which, thank goodness, I lost no time in discovering for

myself. He's perfectly gone--and I couldn't have borne it for her

if he hadn't been. She's just too sweet."

Strether hesitated. "And through being in love too?"

On which with a smile that struck him as wonderful Mamie had a

wonderful answer. "She doesn't know if she is or not."

It made him again laugh out. "Oh but YOU do!"

She was willing to take it that way. "Oh yes, I know everything."

And as she sat there rubbing her polished hands and making the best

of it--only holding her elbows perhaps a little too much out--the

momentary effect for Strether was that every one else, in all their

affair, seemed stupid.

"Know that poor little Jeanne doesn't know what's the matter with

her?"

It was as near as they came to saying that she was probably in love

with Chad; but it was quite near enough for what Strether wanted;

which was to be confirmed in his certitude that, whether in love or

not, she appealed to something large and easy in the girl before

him. Mamie would be fat, too fat, at thirty; but she would always

be the person who, at the present sharp hour, had been

disinterestedly tender. "If I see a little more of her, as I hope

I shall, I think she'll like me enough--for she seemed to like me

to-day--to want me to tell her."

"And SHALL you?"

"Perfectly. I shall tell her the matter with her is that she wants

only too much to do right. To do right for her, naturally," said

Mamie, "is to please."

"Her mother, do you mean?"

"Her mother first."

Strether waited. "And then?"

"Well, 'then'--Mr. Newsome."

There was something really grand for him in the serenity of this

reference. "And last only Monsieur de Montbron?"

"Last only"--she good-humouredly kept it up.

Strether considered. "So that every one after all then will be

suited?"

She had one of her few hesitations, but it was a question only of a

moment; and it was her nearest approach to being explicit with him

about what was between them. "I think I can speak for myself. I

shall be."

It said indeed so much, told such a story of her being ready to

help him, so committed to him that truth, in short, for such use as

he might make of it toward those ends of his own with which,

patiently and trustfully, she had nothing to do--it so fully

achieved all this that he appeared to himself simply to meet it in

its own spirit by the last frankness of admiration. Admiration was

of itself almost accusatory, but nothing less would serve to show

her how nearly he understood. He put out his hand for good-bye

with a "Splendid, splendid, splendid!" And he left her, in her

splendour, still waiting for little Bilham.

Book Tenth

I

Strether occupied beside little Bilham, three evenings after his

interview with Mamie Pocock, the same deep divan they had enjoyed

together on the first occasion of our friend's meeting Madame de

Vionnet and her daughter in the apartment of the Boulevard

Malesherbes, where his position affirmed itself again as ministering

to an easy exchange of impressions. The present evening had a

different stamp; if the company was much more numerous, so,

inevitably, were the ideas set in motion. It was on the other

hand, however, now strongly marked that the talkers moved,

in respect to such matters, round an inner, a protected circle.

They knew at any rate what really concerned them to-night, and

Strether had begun by keeping his companion close to it.

Only a few of Chad's guests had dined--that is fifteen or twenty,

a few compared with the large concourse offered to sight by eleven

o'clock; but number and mass, quantity and quality, light,

fragrance, sound, the overflow of hospitality meeting the high tide

of response, had all from the first pressed upon Strether's

consciousness, and he felt himself somehow part and parcel of the

most festive scene, as the term was, in which he had ever in his

life been engaged. He had perhaps seen, on Fourths of July and on

dear old domestic Commencements, more people assembled, but he had

never seen so many in proportion to the space, or had at all events

never known so great a promiscuity to show so markedly as picked.

Numerous as was the company, it had still been made so by

selection, and what was above all rare for Strether was that, by no

fault of his own, he was in the secret of the principle that had

worked. He hadn't enquired, he had averted his head, but Chad had

put him a pair of questions that themselves smoothed the ground.

He hadn't answered the questions, he had replied that they were

the young man's own affair; and he had then seen perfectly that the

latter's direction was already settled.

Chad had applied for counsel only by way of intimating that he knew

what to do; and he had clearly never known it better than in now

presenting to his sister the whole circle of his society. This was

all in the sense and the spirit of the note struck by him on that

lady's arrival; he had taken at the station itself a line that led

him without a break, and that enabled him to lead the Pococks--

though dazed a little, no doubt, breathless, no doubt, and

bewildered--to the uttermost end of the passage accepted by them

perforce as pleasant. He had made it for them violently pleasant

and mercilessly full; the upshot of which was, to Strether's

vision, that they had come all the way without discovering it to be

really no passage at all. It was a brave blind alley, where to

pass was impossible and where, unless they stuck fast, they would

have--which was always awkward--publicly to back out. They were

touching bottom assuredly tonight; the whole scene represented the

terminus of the cul-de-sac. So could things go when there was a

hand to keep them consistent--a hand that pulled the wire with a

skill at which the elder man more and more marvelled. The elder

man felt responsible, but he also felt successful, since what had

taken place was simply the issue of his own contention, six weeks

before, that they properly should wait to see what their friends

would have really to say. He had determined Chad to wait, he had

determined him to see; he was therefore not to quarrel with the

time given up to the business. As much as ever, accordingly, now

that a fortnight had elapsed, the situation created for Sarah, and

against which she had raised no protest, was that of her having

accommodated herself to her adventure as to a pleasure-party

surrendered perhaps even somewhat in excess to bustle and to

"pace." If her brother had been at any point the least bit open to

criticism it might have been on the ground of his spicing the

draught too highly and pouring the cup too full. Frankly treating

the whole occasion of the presence of his relatives as an

opportunity for amusement, he left it, no doubt, but scant margin

as an opportunity for anything else. He suggested, invented,

abounded--yet all the while with the loosest easiest rein.

Strether, during his own weeks, had gained a sense of knowing

Paris; but he saw it afresh, and with fresh emotion, in the form of

the knowledge offered to his colleague.

A thousand unuttered thoughts hummed for him in the air of these

observations; not the least frequent of which was that Sarah might

well of a truth not quite know whither she was drifting. She was

in no position not to appear to expect that Chad should treat her

handsomely; yet she struck our friend as privately stiffening a

little each time she missed the chance of marking the great nuance.

The great nuance was in brief that of course her brother must treat

her handsomely--she should like to see him not; but that treating

her handsomely, none the less, wasn't all in all--treating her

handsomely buttered no parsnips; and that in fine there were

moments when she felt the fixed eyes of their admirable absent

mother fairly screw into the flat of her back. Strether, watching,

after his habit, and overscoring with thought, positively had

moments of his own in which he found himself sorry for her--

occasions on which she affected him as a person seated in a runaway

vehicle and turning over the question of a possible jump. WOULD

she jump, could she, would THAT be a safe placed--this question, at

such instants, sat for him in her lapse into pallor, her tight

lips, her conscious eyes. It came back to the main point at issue:

would she be, after all, to be squared? He believed on the whole

she would jump; yet his alternations on this subject were the more

especial stuff of his suspense. One thing remained well before

him--a conviction that was in fact to gain sharpness from the

impressions of this evening: that if she SHOULD gather in her

skirts, close her eyes and quit the carriage while in motion, he

would promptly enough become aware. She would alight from her

headlong course more or less directly upon him; it would be

appointed to him, unquestionably, to receive her entire weight.

Signs and portents of the experience thus in reserve for him had as

it happened, multiplied even through the dazzle of Chad's party.

It was partly under the nervous consciousness of such a prospect

that, leaving almost every one in the two other rooms, leaving

those of the guests already known to him as well as a mass of

brilliant strangers of both sexes and of several varieties of

speech, he had desired five quiet minutes with little Bilham, whom

he always found soothing and even a little inspiring, and to whom

he had actually moreover something distinct and important to say.

He had felt of old--for it already seemed long ago--rather

humiliated at discovering he could learn in talk with a personage

so much his junior the lesson of a certain moral ease; but he had

now got used to that--whether or no the mixture of the fact with

other humiliations had made it indistinct, whether or no directly

from little Bilham's example, the example of his being contentedly

just the obscure and acute little Bilham he was. It worked so for

him, Strether seemed to see; and our friend had at private hours a

wan smile over the fact that he himself, after so many more years,

was still in search of something that would work. However, as we

have said, it worked just now for them equally to have found a

corner a little apart. What particularly kept it apart was the

circumstance that the music in the salon was admirable, with two or

three such singers as it was a privilege to hear in private. Their

presence gave a distinction to Chad's entertainment, and the

interest of calculating their effect on Sarah was actually so sharp

as to be almost painful. Unmistakeably, in her single person, the

motive of the composition and dressed in a splendour of crimson

which affected Strether as the sound of a fall through a skylight,

she would now be in the forefront of the listening circle and

committed by it up to her eyes. Those eyes during the wonderful

dinner itself he hadn't once met; having confessedly--perhaps a

little pusillanimously--arranged with Chad that he should be on the

same side of the table. But there was no use in having arrived now

with little Bilham at an unprecedented point of intimacy unless he

could pitch everything into the pot. "You who sat where you could

see her, what does she make of it all? By which I mean on what

terms does she take it?"

"Oh she takes it, I judge, as proving that the claim of his family

is more than ever justified "

"She isn't then pleased with what he has to show?"

"On the contrary; she's pleased with it as with his capacity to do

this kind of thing--more than she has been pleased with anything

for a long time. But she wants him to show it THERE. He has no

right to waste it on the likes of us."

Strether wondered. "She wants him to move the whole thing over?"

"The whole thing--with an important exception. Everything he has

'picked up'--and the way he knows how. She sees no difficulty in

that. She'd run the show herself, and she'll make the handsome

concession that Woollett would be on the whole in some ways the

better for it. Not that it wouldn't be also in some ways the

better for Woollett. The people there are just as good."

"Just as good as you and these others? Ah that may be. But such

an occasion as this, whether or no," Strether said, "isn't the

people. It's what has made the people possible."

"Well then," his friend replied, "there you are; I give you my

impression for what it's worth. Mrs. Pocock has SEEN, and that's

to-night how she sits there. If you were to have a glimpse of her

face you'd understand me. She has made up her mind--to the sound

of expensive music."

Strether took it freely in. "Ah then I shall have news of her."

"I don't want to frighten you, but I think that likely. However,"

little Bilham continued, "if I'm of the least use to you to hold on

by--!"

"You're not of the least!"--and Strether laid an appreciative hand

on him to say it. "No one's of the least." With which, to mark how

gaily he could take it, he patted his companion's knee. "I must

meet my fate alone, and I SHALL--oh you'll see! And yet," he

pursued the next moment, "you CAN help me too. You once said to

me"--he followed this further--"that you held Chad should marry.

I didn't see then so well as I know now that you meant he should

marry Miss Pocock. Do you still consider that he should? Because

if you do"--he kept it up--"I want you immediately to change your

mind. You can help me that way."

"Help you by thinking he should NOT marry?"

"Not marry at all events Mamie."

"And who then?"

"Ah," Strether returned, "that I'm not obliged to say. But Madame

de Vionnet--I suggest--when he can.'

"Oh!" said little Bilham with some sharpness.

"Oh precisely! But he needn't marry at all--I'm at any rate not

obliged to provide for it. Whereas in your case I rather feel that

I AM."

Little Bilham was amused. "Obliged to provide for my marrying?"

"Yes--after all I've done to you!"

The young man weighed it. "Have you done as much as that?"

"Well," said Strether, thus challenged, "of course I must remember

what you've also done to ME. We may perhaps call it square. But

all the same," he went on, "I wish awfully you'd marry Mamie Pocock

yourself."

Little Bilham laughed out. "Why it was only the other night, in

this very place, that you were proposing to me a different union

altogether."

''Mademoiselle de Vionnet?" Well, Strether easily confessed it.

"That, I admit, was a vain image. THIS is practical politics.

I want to do something good for both of you--I wish you each so well;

and you can see in a moment the trouble it will save me to polish

you off by the same stroke. She likes you, you know. You console

her. And she's splendid."

Little Bilham stared as a delicate appetite stares at an overheaped

plate. "What do I console her for?"

It just made his friend impatient. "Oh come, you knows"

"And what proves for you that she likes me?"

"Why the fact that I found her three days ago stopping at home

alone all the golden afternoon on the mere chance that you'd come

to her, and hanging over her balcony on that of seeing your cab

drive up. I don't know what you want more."

Little Bilham after a moment found it. "Only just to know what

proves to you that I like HER."

"Oh if what I've just mentioned isn't enough to make you do it,

you're a stony-hearted little fiend. Besides"--Strether encouraged

his fancy's flight--"you showed your inclination in the way you

kept her waiting, kept her on purpose to see if she cared enough

for you."

His companion paid his ingenuity the deference of a pause. "I didn't

keep her waiting. I came at the hour. I wouldn't have kept her

waiting for the world," the young man honourably declared.

"Better still--then there you are!" And Strether, charmed, held

him the faster. "Even if you didn't do her justice, moreover," he

continued, "I should insist on your immediately coming round to it.

I want awfully to have worked it. I want"--and our friend spoke

now with a yearning that was really earnest--"at least to have done

THAT."

"To have married me off--without a penny?"

"Well, I shan't live long; and I give you my word, now and here,

that I'll leave you every penny of my own. I haven't many,

unfortunately, but you shall have them all. And Miss Pocock, I

think, has a few. I want," Strether went on, "to have been at

least to that extent constructive even expiatory. I've been

sacrificing so to strange gods that I feel I want to put on record,

somehow, my fidelity--fundamentally unchanged after all--to our

own. I feel as if my hands were embrued with the blood of

monstrous alien altars--of another faith altogether. There it is--

it's done." And then he further explained. "It took hold of me

because the idea of getting her quite out of the way for Chad

helps to clear my ground."

The young man, at this, bounced about, and it brought them face to

face in admitted amusement. "You want me to marry as a convenience

to Chad?"

"No," Strether debated--"HE doesn't care whether you marry or not.

It's as a convenience simply to my own plan FOR him."

"'Simply'!"--and little Bilham's concurrence was in itself a lively

comment. "Thank you. But I thought," he continued, "you had

exactly NO plan 'for' him."

"Well then call it my plan for myself--which may be well, as you

say, to have none. His situation, don't you see? is reduced now to

the bare facts one has to recognise. Mamie doesn't want him, and

he doesn't want Mamie: so much as that these days have made

clear. It's a thread we can wind up and tuck in."

But little Bilham still questioned. "YOU can--since you seem so

much to want to. But why should I?"

Poor Strether thought it over, but was obliged of course to admit

that his demonstration did superficially fail. "Seriously, there

is no reason. It's my affair--I must do it alone. I've only my

fantastic need of making my dose stiff."

Little Bilham wondered. "What do you call your dose?"

"Why what I have to swallow. I want my conditions unmitigated."

He had spoken in the tone of talk for talk's sake, and yet with an

obscure truth lurking in the loose folds; a circumstance presently

not without its effect on his young friend. Little Bilham's eyes

rested on him a moment with some intensity; then suddenly, as if

everything had cleared up, he gave a happy laugh. It seemed to say

that if pretending, or even trying, or still even hoping, to be

able to care for Mamie would be of use, he was all there for the

job. "I'll do anything in the world for you!"

"Well," Strether smiled, "anything in the world is all I want. I

don't know anything that pleased me in her more," he went on, "than

the way that, on my finding her up there all alone, coming on her

unawares and feeling greatly for her being so out of it, she

knocked down my tall house of cards with her instant and cheerful

allusion to the next young man. It was somehow so the note I

needed--her staying at home to receive him."

"It was Chad of course," said little Bilham, "who asked the next

young man--I like your name for me!--to call."

"So I supposed--all of which, thank God, is in our innocent and

natural manners. But do you know," Strether asked, "if Chad

knows--?" And then as this interlocutor seemed at a loss:

"Why where she has come out."

Little Bilham, at this, met his face with a conscious look--it was

as if, more than anything yet, the allusion had penetrated. "Do

you know yourself?"

Strether lightly shook his head. "There I stop. Oh, odd as it may

appear to you, there ARE things I don't know. I only got the sense

from her of something very sharp, and yet very deep down, that she

was keeping all to herself. That is I had begun with the belief

that she HAD kept it to herself; but face to face with her there

I soon made out that there was a person with whom she would have

shared it. I had thought she possibly might with ME--but I saw

then that I was only half in her confidence. When, turning to me

to greet me--for she was on the balcony and I had come in without

her knowing it--she showed me she had been expecting YOU and was

proportionately disappointed, I got hold of the tail of my

conviction. Half an hour later I was in possession of all the rest

of it. You know what has happened." He looked at his young friend

hard--then he felt sure. "For all you say, you're up to your eyes.

So there you are."

Little Bilham after an instant pulled half round. "I assure you

she hasn't told me anything."

"Of course she hasn't. For what do you suggest that I suppose her

to take you? But you've been with her every day, you've seen her

freely, you've liked her greatly--I stick to that--and you've made

your profit of it. You know what she has been through as well as

you know that she has dined here to-night--which must have put her,

by the way, through a good deal more."

The young man faced this blast; after which he pulled round the

rest of the way. "I haven't in the least said she hasn't been

nice to me. But she's proud."

"And quite properly. But not too proud for that."

"It's just her pride that has made her. Chad," little Bilham

loyally went on, "has really been as kind to her as possible.

It's awkward for a man when a girl's in love with him."

"Ah but she isn't--now."

Little Bilham sat staring before him; then he sprang up as if his

friend's penetration, recurrent and insistent, made him really

after all too nervous. "No--she isn't now. It isn't in the

least," he went on, "Chad's fault. He's really all right. I mean

he would have been willing. But she came over with ideas. Those

she had got at home. They had been her motive and support in

joining her brother and his wife. She was to SAVE our friend."

"Ah like me, poor thing?" Strether also got to his feet.

"Exactly--she had a bad moment. It was very soon distinct to her,

to pull her up, to let her down, that, alas, he was, he IS, saved.

There's nothing left for her to do."

"Not even to love him?"

"She would have loved him better as she originally believed him."

Strether wondered "Of course one asks one's self what notion a

little girl forms, where a young man's in question, of such a

history and such a state."

"Well, this little girl saw them, no doubt, as obscure, but she saw

them practically as wrong. The wrong for her WAS the obscure.

Chad turns out at any rate right and good and disconcerting, while

what she was all prepared for, primed and girded and wound up for,

was to deal with him as the general opposite."

"Yet wasn't her whole point"--Strether weighed it--"that he was to

be, that he COULD be, made better, redeemed?"

Little Bilham fixed it all a moment, and then with a small

headshake that diffused a tenderness: "She's too late. Too late

for the miracle."

"Yes"--his companion saw enough. "Still, if the worst fault of his

condition is that it may be all there for her to profit by--?"

"Oh she doesn't want to 'profit,' in that flat way. She doesn't

want to profit by another woman's work--she wants the miracle to

have been her own miracle. THAT'S what she's too late for."

Strether quite felt how it all fitted, yet there seemed one loose

piece. "I'm bound to say, you know, that she strikes one, on these

lines, as fastidious--what you call here difficile."

Little Bilham tossed up his chin. "Of course she's difficile--on

any lines! What else in the world ARE our Mamies--the real, the

right ones?"

"I see, I see," our friend repeated, charmed by the responsive

wisdom he had ended by so richly extracting. "Mamie is one of the

real and the right."

"The very thing itself."

"And what it comes to then," Strether went on, "is that poor awful

Chad is simply too good for her."

"Ah too good was what he was after all to be; but it was she

herself, and she herself only, who was to have made him so."

It hung beautifully together, but with still a loose end. "Wouldn't

he do for her even if he should after all break--"

"With his actual influence?" Oh little Bilham had for this

enquiry the sharpest of all his controls. "How can he 'do'--on any

terms whatever--when he's flagrantly spoiled?"

Strether could only meet the question with his passive, his

receptive pleasure. "Well, thank goodness, YOU'RE not! You

remain for her to save, and I come back, on so beautiful and full a

demonstration, to my contention of just now--that of your showing

distinct signs of her having already begun."

The most he could further say to himself--as his young friend turned

away--was that the charge encountered for the moment no renewed

denial. Little Bilham, taking his course back to the music, only

shook his good-natured ears an instant, in the manner of a terrier

who has got wet; while Strether relapsed into the sense--which had

for him in these days most of comfort--that he was free to believe

in anything that from hour to hour kept him going. He had

positively motions and flutters of this conscious hour-to-hour

kind, temporary surrenders to irony, to fancy, frequent instinctive

snatches at the growing rose of observation, constantly stronger

for him, as he felt, in scent and colour, and in which he could

bury his nose even to wantonness. This last resource was offered

him, for that matter, in the very form of his next clear

perception--the vision of a prompt meeting, in the doorway of the

room, between little Bilham and brilliant Miss Barrace, who was

entering as Bilham withdrew. She had apparently put him a

question, to which he had replied by turning to indicate his late

interlocutor; toward whom, after an interrogation further aided by

a resort to that optical machinery which seemed, like her other

ornaments, curious and archaic, the genial lady, suggesting more

than ever for her fellow guest the old French print, the historic

portrait, directed herself with an intention that Strether

instantly met. He knew in advance the first note she would sound,

and took in as she approached all her need of sounding it. Nothing

yet had been so "wonderful" between them as the present occasion;

and it was her special sense of this quality in occasions that she

was there, as she was in most places, to feed. That sense had

already been so well fed by the situation about them that she had

quitted the other room, forsaken the music, dropped out of the

play, abandoned, in a word, the stage itself, that she might stand

a minute behind the scenes with Strether and so perhaps figure as

one of the famous augurs replying, behind the oracle, to the wink

of the other. Seated near him presently where little Bilham had

sat, she replied in truth to many things; beginning as soon as he

had said to her--what he hoped he said without fatuity--"All you

ladies are extraordinarily kind to me."

She played her long handle, which shifted her observation; she saw

in an instant all the absences that left them free. "How can we be

anything else? But isn't that exactly your plight? 'We ladies'--

oh we're nice, and you must be having enough of us! As one of us,

you know, I don't pretend I'm crazy about us. But Miss Gostrey at

least to-night has left you alone, hasn't she?" With which she

again looked about as if Maria might still lurk.

"Oh yes," said Strether; "she's only sitting up for me at home."

And then as this elicited from his companion her gay "Oh, oh, oh!"

he explained that he meant sitting up in suspense and prayer. "We

thought it on the whole better she shouldn't be present; and

either way of course it's a terrible worry for her." He abounded in

the sense of his appeal to the ladies, and they might take their

choice of his doing so from humility or from pride. "Yet she

inclines to believe I shall come out."

"Oh I incline to believe too you'll come out!"--Miss Barrace, with

her laugh, was not to be behind. "Only the question's about WHERE,

isn't it? However," she happily continued, "if it's anywhere at

all it must be very far on, mustn't it? To do us justice, I

think, you know," she laughed, "we do, among us all, want you

rather far on. Yes, yes," she repeated in her quick droll way;

"we want you very, VERY far on!" After which she wished to know

why he had thought it better Maria shouldn't be present.

"Oh," he replied, "it was really her own idea. I should have

wished it. But she dreads responsibility."

"And isn't that a new thing for her?"

"To dread it? No doubt--no doubt. But her nerve has given way."

Miss Barrace looked at him a moment. "She has too much at stake."

Then less gravely: "Mine, luckily for me, holds out."

"Luckily for me too"--Strether came back to that. "My own isn't

so firm, MY appetite for responsibility isn't so sharp, as that I

haven't felt the very principle of this occasion to be 'the more

the merrier.' If we ARE so merry it's because Chad has understood

so well."

"He has understood amazingly," said Miss Barrace.

"It's wonderful--Strether anticipated for her.

"It's wonderful!" she, to meet it, intensified; so that, face to

face over it, they largely and recklessly laughed. But she

presently added: "Oh I see the principle. If one didn't one

would be lost. But when once one has got hold of it--"

"It's as simple as twice two! From the moment he had to do

something--"

"A crowd"--she took him straight up--"was the only thing? Rather,

rather: a rumpus of sound," she laughed, "or nothing. Mrs.

Pocock's built in, or built out--whichever you call it; she's

packed so tight she can't move. She's in splendid isolation"--

Miss Barrace embroidered the theme.

Strether followed, but scrupulous of justice. "Yet with every one

in the place successively introduced to her."

"Wonderfully--but just so that it does build her out. She's

bricked up, she's buried alive!"

Strether seemed for a moment to look at it; but it brought him to

a sigh. "Oh but she's not dead! It will take more than this to

kill her."

His companion had a pause that might have been for pity. "No, I

can't pretend I think she's finished--or that it's for more than

to-night." She remained pensive as if with the same compunction.

"It's only up to her chin." Then again for the fun of it: "She

can breathe."

"She can breathe!"--he echoed it in the same spirit. "And do you

know," he went on, "what's really all this time happening to me?--

through the beauty of music, the gaiety of voices, the uproar in

short of our revel and the felicity of your wit? The sound of

Mrs. Pocock's respiration drowns for me, I assure you, every other.

It's literally all I hear."

She focussed him with her clink of chains. "Well--!" she breathed

ever so kindly.

"Well, what?"

"She IS free from her chin up," she mused; "and that WILL be enough

for her."

"It will be enough for me!" Strether ruefully laughed. "Waymarsh

has really," he then asked, "brought her to see you?"

"Yes--but that's the worst of it. I could do you no good. And yet

I tried hard."

Strether wondered. "And how did you try?"

"Why I didn't speak of you."

"I see. That was better."

"Then what would have been worse? For speaking or silent," she

lightly wailed, "I somehow 'compromise.' And it has never been any

one but you."

"That shows"--he was magnanimous--"that it's something not in you,

but in one's self. It's MY fault."

She was silent a little. "No, it's Mr. Waymarsh's. It's the fault

of his having brought her."

"Ah then," said Strether good-naturedly, "why DID he bring her?"

"He couldn't afford not to."

"Oh you were a trophy--one of the spoils of conquest? But why in

that case, since you do 'compromise'--"

"Don't I compromise HIM as well? I do compromise him as well,"

Miss Barrace smiled. "I compromise him as hard as I can. But for

Mr. Waymarsh it isn't fatal. It's--so far as his wonderful

relation with Mrs. Pocock is concerned--favourable." And then, as

he still seemed slightly at sea: "The man who had succeeded with

ME, don't you see? For her to get him from me was such an added

incentive."

Strether saw, but as if his path was still strewn with surprises.

"It's 'from' you then that she has got him?"

She was amused at his momentary muddle. "You can fancy my fight!

She believes in her triumph. I think it has been part of her joy.

"Oh her joy!" Strether sceptically murmured.

"Well, she thinks she has had her own way. And what's to-night for

her but a kind of apotheosis? Her frock's really good."

"Good enough to go to heaven in? For after a real apotheosis,"

Strether went on, "there's nothing BUT heaven. For Sarah there's

only to-morrow."

"And you mean that she won't find to-morrow heavenly?"

"Well, I mean that I somehow feel to-night--on her behalf--too good

to be true. She has had her cake; that is she's in the act now of

having it, of swallowing the largest and sweetest piece. There

won't be another left for her. Certainly I haven't one. It can

only, at the best, be Chad." He continued to make it out as for

their common entertainment. "He may have one, as it were. up his

sleeve; yet it's borne in upon me that if he had--"

"He wouldn't"--she quite understood--"have taken all THIS trouble?

I dare say not, and, if I may be quite free and dreadful, I very

much hope he won't take any more. Of course I won't pretend now,"

she added, "not to know what it's a question of."

"Oh every one must know now," poor Strether thoughtfully admitted;

"and it's strange enough and funny enough that one should feel

everybody here at this very moment to be knowing and watching and

waiting."

"Yes--isn't it indeed funny?" Miss Barrace quite rose to it.

"That's the way we ARE in Paris." She was always pleased with a new

contribution to that queerness. "It's wonderful! But, you know,"

she declared, "it all depends on you. I don't want to turn the

knife in your vitals, but that's naturally what you just now meant

by our all being on top of you. We know you as the hero of the

drama, and we're gathered to see what you'll do."

Strether looked at her a moment with a light perhaps slightly

obscured. "I think that must be why the hero has taken refuge in

this corner. He's scared at his heroism--he shrinks from his

part."

"Ah but we nevertheless believe he'll play it. That's why,"

Miss Barrace kindly went on, "we take such an interest in you.

We feel you'll come up to the scratch." And then as he seemed

perhaps not quite to take fire: "Don't let him do it."

"Don't let Chad go?"

"Yes, keep hold of him. With all this"--and she indicated the

general tribute--"he has done enough. We love him here--

he's charming."

"It's beautiful," said Strether, "the way you all can simplify

when you will."

But she gave it to him back. "It's nothing to the way you will

when you must."

He winced at it as at the very voice of prophecy, and it kept him

a moment quiet. He detained her, however, on her appearing about

to leave him alone in the rather cold clearance their talk had

made. "There positively isn't a sign of a hero to-night; the

hero's dodging and shirking, the hero's ashamed. Therefore, you

know, I think, what you must all REALLY be occupied with is the

heroine."

Miss Barrace took a minute. "The heroine?"

"The heroine. I've treated her," said Strether, "not a bit like a

hero. Oh," he sighed, "I don't do it well!"

She eased him off. "You do it as you can." And then after another

hesitation: "I think she's satisfied."

But he remained compunctious. "I haven't been near her. I haven't

looked at her."

"Ah then you've lost a good deal!"

He showed he knew it. "She's more wonderful than ever?"

"Than ever. With Mr. Pocock."

Strether wondered. "Madame de Vionnet--with Jim?"

"Madame de Vionnet--with 'Jim.' " Miss Barrace was historic.

"And what's she doing with him?"

"Ah you must ask HIM!"

Strether's face lighted again at the prospect. "It WILL be amusing

to do so." Yet he continued to wonder. "But she must have some

idea."

"Of course she has--she has twenty ideas. She has in the first

place," said Miss Barrace, swinging a little her tortoise-shell,

"that of doing her part. Her part is to help YOU."

It came out as nothing had come yet; links were missing and

connexions unnamed, but it was suddenly as if they were at the

heart of their subject. "Yes; how much more she does it," Strether

gravely reflected, "than I help HER!" It all came over him as with

the near presence of the beauty, the grace, the intense,

dissimulated spirit with which he had, as he said, been putting off

contact. "SHE has courage."

"Ah she has courage!" Miss Barrace quite agreed; and it was as if

for a moment they saw the quantity in each other's face.

But indeed the whole thing was present. "How much she must care!"

"Ah there it is. She does care. But it isn't, is it," Miss

Barrace considerately added, "as if you had ever had any doubt of

that?"

Strether seemed suddenly to like to feel that he really never had.

"Why of course it's the whole point."

"Voila!" Miss Barrace smiled.

"It's why one came out," Strether went on. "And it's why one has

stayed so long. And it's also"--he abounded--"why one's going

home. It's why, it's why--"

"It's why everything!" she concurred. "It's why she might be

to-night--for all she looks and shows, and for all your friend 'Jim'

does--about twenty years old. That's another of her ideas; to be

for him, and to be quite easily and charmingly, as young as a

little girl."

Strether assisted at his distance. "'For him'? For Chad--?"

"For Chad, in a manner, naturally, always. But in particular

to-night for Mr. Pocock." And then as her friend still stared:

"Yes, it IS of a bravery But that's what she has: her high sense

of duty." It was more than sufficiently before them. "When Mr.

Newsome has his hands so embarrassed with his sister--"

"It's quite the least"--Strether filled it out--"that she should

take his sister's husband? Certainly--quite the least. So she has

taken him."

"She has taken him." It was all Miss Barrace had meant.

Still it remained enough. "It must be funny."

"Oh it IS funny." That of course essentially went with it.

But it brought them back. "How indeed then she must cared In

answer to which Strether's entertainer dropped a comprehensive

"Ah!" expressive perhaps of some impatience for the time he took to

get used to it. She herself had got used to it long before.

II

When one morning within the week he perceived the whole thing to be

really at last upon him Strether's immediate feeling was all

relief. He had known this morning that something was about to

happen--known it, in a moment, by Waymarsh's manner when Waymarsh

appeared before him during his brief consumption of coffee and a

roll in the small slippery salle-a-manger so associated with rich

rumination. Strether had taken there of late various lonely and

absent-minded meals; he communed there, even at the end of June,

with a suspected chill, the air of old shivers mixed with old

savours, the air in which so many of his impressions had perversely

matured; the place meanwhile renewing its message to him by the

very circumstance of his single state. He now sat there, for the

most part, to sigh softly, while he vaguely tilted his carafe, over

the vision of how much better Waymarsh was occupied. That was

really his success by the common measure--to have led this

companion so on and on. He remembered how at first there had been

scarce a squatting-place he could beguile him into passing;

the actual outcome of which at last was that there was scarce one

that could arrest him in his rush. His rush--as Strether vividly and

amusedly figured it--continued to be all with Sarah, and contained

perhaps moreover the word of the whole enigma, whipping up in its

fine full-flavoured froth the very principle, for good or for ill,

of his own, of Strether's destiny. It might after all, to the end,

only be that they had united to save him, and indeed, so far as

Waymarsh was concerned, that HAD to be the spring of action.

Strether was glad at all events, in connexion with the case, that

the saving he required was not more scant; so constituted a luxury

was it in certain lights just to lurk there out of the full glare.

He had moments of quite seriously wondering whether Waymarsh wouldn't

in fact, thanks to old friendship and a conceivable indulgence,

make about as good terms for him as he might make for himself.

They wouldn't be the same terms of course; but they might have the

advantage that he himself probably should be able to make none at

all.

He was never in the morning very late, but Waymarsh had already

been out, and, after a peep into the dim refectory, he presented

himself with much less than usual of his large looseness. He had

made sure, through the expanse of glass exposed to the court, that

they would be alone; and there was now in fact that about him that

pretty well took up the room. He was dressed in the garments of

summer; and save that his white waistcoat was redundant and bulging

these things favoured, they determined, his expression. He wore a

straw hat such as his friend hadn't yet seen in Paris, and he

showed a buttonhole freshly adorned with a magnificent rose.

Strether read on the instant his story--how, astir for the previous

hour, the sprinkled newness of the day, so pleasant at that season

in Paris, he was fairly panting with the pulse of adventure and had

been with Mrs. Pocock, unmistakeably, to the Marche aux Fleurs.

Strether really knew in this vision of him a joy that was akin to

envy; so reversed as he stood there did their old positions seem;

so comparatively doleful now showed, by the sharp turn of the

wheel, the posture of the pilgrim from Woollett. He wondered, this

pilgrim, if he had originally looked to Waymarsh so brave and well,

so remarkably launched, as it was at present the latter's privilege

to appear. He recalled that his friend had remarked to him even at

Chester that his aspect belied his plea of prostration; but there

certainly couldn't have been, for an issue, an aspect less

concerned than Waymarsh's with the menace of decay. Strether had

at any rate never resembled a Southern planter of the great days--

which was the image picturesquely suggested by the happy relation

between the fuliginous face and the wide panama of his visitor.

This type, it further amused him to guess, had been, on Waymarsh's

part, the object of Sarah's care; he was convinced that her taste

had not been a stranger to the conception and purchase of the hat,

any more than her fine fingers had been guiltless of the bestowal

of the rose. It came to him in the current of thought, as things

so oddly did come, that HE had never risen with the lark to attend

a brilliant woman to the Marche aux Fleurs; this could be fastened

on him in connexion neither with Miss Gostrey nor with Madame de

Vionnet; the practice of getting up early for adventures could

indeed in no manner be fastened on him. It came to him in fact

that just here was his usual case: he was for ever missing things

through his general genius for missing them, while others were for

ever picking them up through a contrary bent. And it was others

who looked abstemious and he who looked greedy; it was he somehow

who finally paid, and it was others who mainly partook. Yes, he

should go to the scaffold yet for he wouldn't know quite whom. He

almost, for that matter, felt on the scaffold now and really quite

enjoying it. It worked out as BECAUSE he was anxious there--it

worked out as for this reason that Waymarsh was so blooming. It

was HIS trip for health, for a change, that proved the success--

which was just what Strether, planning and exerting himself, had

desired it should be. That truth already sat full-blown on his

companion's lips; benevolence breathed from them as with the warmth

of active exercise, and also a little as with the bustle of haste.

"Mrs. Pocock, whom I left a quarter of an hour ago at her hotel,

has asked me to mention to you that she would like to find you at

home here in about another hour. She wants to see you; she has

something to say--or considers, I believe, that you may have: so

that I asked her myself why she shouldn't come right round. She

hasn't BEEN round yet--to see our place; and I took upon myself to

say that I was sure you'd be glad to have her. The thing's

therefore, you see, to keep right here till she comes."

The announcement was sociably, even though, after Waymarsh's wont,

somewhat solemnly made; but Strether quickly felt other things in

it than these light features. It was the first approach, from that

quarter, to admitted consciousness; it quickened his pulse; it

simply meant at last that he should have but himself to thank if he

didn't know where he was. He had finished his breakfast; he

pushed it away and was on his feet. There were plenty of elements

of surprise, but only one of doubt. "The thing's for YOU to keep

here too?" Waymarsh had been slightly ambiguous.

He wasn't ambiguous, however, after this enquiry; and Strether's

understanding had probably never before opened so wide and

effective a mouth as it was to open during the next five minutes.

It was no part of his friend's wish, as appeared, to help to

receive Mrs. Pocock; he quite understood the spirit in which she

was to present herself, but his connexion with her visit was

limited to his having--well, as he might say--perhaps a little

promoted it. He had thought, and had let her know it, that

Strether possibly would think she might have been round before. At

any rate, as turned out, she had been wanting herself, quite a

while, to come. "I told her," said Waymarsh, "that it would have

been a bright idea if she had only carried it out before."

Strether pronounced it so bright as to be almost dazzling. "But

why HASn't she carried it out before? She has seen me every day--

she had only to name her hour. I've been waiting and waiting."

"Well, I told her you had. And she has been waiting too." It was,

in the oddest way in the world, on the showing of this tone, a

genial new pressing coaxing Waymarsh; a Waymarsh conscious with a

different consciousness from any he had yet betrayed, and actually

rendered by it almost insinuating. He lacked only time for full

persuasion, and Strether was to see in a moment why. Meantime,

however, our friend perceived, he was announcing a step of some

magnanimity on Mrs. Pocock's part, so that he could deprecate a

sharp question. It was his own high purpose in fact to have

smoothed sharp questions to rest. He looked his old comrade very

straight in the eyes, and he had never conveyed to him in so mute a

manner so much kind confidence and so much good advice. Everything

that was between them was again in his face, but matured and

shelved and finally disposed of. "At any rate," he added, "she's

coming now."

Considering how many pieces had to fit themselves, it all fell, in

Strether's brain, into a close rapid order. He saw on the spot

what had happened, and what probably would yet; and it was all

funny enough. It was perhaps just this freedom of appreciation

that wound him up to his flare of high spirits. "What is she

coming FOR?--to kill me?"

"She's coming to be very VERY kind to you, and you must let me say

that I greatly hope you'll not be less so to herself."

This was spoken by Waymarsh with much gravity of admonition, and as

Strether stood there he knew he had but to make a movement to take

the attitude of a man gracefully receiving a present. The present

was that of the opportunity dear old Waymarsh had flattered himself

he had divined in him the slight soreness of not having yet

thoroughly enjoyed; so he had brought it to him thus, as on a

little silver breakfast-tray, familiarly though delicately--without

oppressive pomp; and he was to bend and smile and acknowledge, was

to take and use and be grateful. He was not--that was the beauty

of it--to be asked to deflect too much from his dignity. No wonder

the old boy bloomed in this bland air of his own distillation.

Strether felt for a moment as if Sarah were actually walking up and

down outside. Wasn't she hanging about the porte-cochere while

her friend thus summarily opened a way? Strether would meet her

but to take it, and everything would be for the best in the best of

possible worlds. He had never so much known what any one meant as,

in the light of this demonstration, he knew what Mrs. Newsome did.

It had reached Waymarsh from Sarah, but it had reached Sarah from

her mother, and there was no break in the chain by which it reached

HIM. "Has anything particular happened," he asked after a minute--

"so suddenly to determine her? Has she heard anything unexpected

from home?"

Waymarsh, on this, it seemed to him, looked at him harder than

ever. "'Unexpected'?" He had a brief hesitation; then, however,

he was firm. "We're leaving Paris."

"Leaving? That IS sudden."

Waymarsh showed a different opinion. "Less so than it may seem.

The purpose of Mrs. Pocock's visit is to explain to you in fact

that it's NOT."

Strether didn't at all know if he had really an advantage--

anything that would practically count as one; but he enjoyed for

the moment--as for the first time in his life--the sense of so

carrying it off. He wondered--it was amusing--if he felt as the

impudent feel. "I shall take great pleasure, I assure you, in any

explanation. I shall be delighted to receive Sarah."

The sombre glow just darkened in his comrade's eyes; but he was

struck with the way it died out again. It was too mixed with

another consciousness--it was too smothered, as might be said, in

flowers. He really for the time regretted it--poor dear old sombre

glow! Something straight and simple, something heavy and empty, had

been eclipsed in its company; something by which he had best known

his friend. Waymarsh wouldn't BE his friend, somehow, without the

occasional ornament of the sacred rage, and the right to the sacred

rage--inestimably precious for Strether's charity--he also seemed

in a manner, and at Mrs. Pocock's elbow, to have forfeited.

Strether remembered the occasion early in their stay when on that

very spot he had come out with his earnest, his ominous "Quit it!"--

and, so remembering, felt it hang by a hair that he didn't

himself now utter the same note. Waymarsh was having a good time--

this was the truth that was embarrassing for him, and he was having

it then and there, he was having it in Europe, he was having it

under the very protection of circumstances of which he didn't in

the least approve; all of which placed him in a false position,

with no issue possible--none at least by the grand manner. It was

practically in the manner of any one--it was all but in poor

Strether's own--that instead of taking anything up he merely made

the most of having to be himself explanatory. "I'm not leaving for

the United States direct. Mr. and Mrs. Pocock and Miss Mamie are

thinking of a little trip before their own return, and we've been

talking for some days past of our joining forces. We've settled it

that we do join and that we sail together the end of next month.

But we start to-morrow for Switzerland. Mrs. Pocock wants some

scenery. She hasn't had much yet."

He was brave in his way too, keeping nothing back, confessing all

there was, and only leaving Strether to make certain connexions.

"Is what Mrs. Newsome had cabled her daughter an injunction to

break off short?"

The grand manner indeed at this just raised its head a little.

"I know nothing about Mrs. Newsome's cables."

Their eyes met on it with some intensity--during the few seconds of

which something happened quite out of proportion to the time.

It happened that Strether, looking thus at his friend, didn't take

his answer for truth--and that something more again occurred in

consequence of THAT. Yes--Waymarsh just DID know about

Mrs. Newsome's cables: to what other end than that had they dined

together at Bignon's? Strether almost felt for the instant that it

was to Mrs. Newsome herself the dinner had been given; and, for

that matter, quite felt how she must have known about it and, as he

might think, protected and consecrated it. He had a quick blurred

view of daily cables, questions, answers, signals: clear enough

was his vision of the expense that, when so wound up, the lady at

home was prepared to incur. Vivid not less was his memory of what,

during his long observation of her, some of her attainments of that

high pitch had cost her. Distinctly she was at the highest now,

and Waymarsh, who imagined himself an independent performer, was

really, forcing his fine old natural voice, an overstrained

accompanist. The whole reference of his errand seemed to mark her

for Strether as by this time consentingly familiar to him, and

nothing yet had so despoiled her of a special shade of

consideration. "You don't know," he asked, "whether Sarah has been

directed from home to try me on the matter of my also going to

Switzerland?"

"I know," said Waymarsh as manfully as possible, "nothing whatever

about her private affairs; though I believe her to be acting in

conformity with things that have my highest respect." It was as

manful as possible, but it was still the false note--as it had to

be to convey so sorry a statement. He knew everything, Strether

more and more felt, that he thus disclaimed, and his little

punishment was just in this doom to a second fib. What falser

position--given the man--could the most vindictive mind impose?

He ended by squeezing through a passage in which three months before

he would certainly have stuck fast. "Mrs Pocock will probably be

ready herself to answer any enquiry you may put to her. But,"

he continued, "BUT--!" He faltered on it.

"But what? Don't put her too many?"

Waymarsh looked large, but the harm was done; he couldn't, do what

he would, help looking rosy. "Don't do anything you'll be sorry for."

It was an attenuation, Strether guessed, of something else that had

been on his lips; it was a sudden drop to directness, and was

thereby the voice of sincerity. He had fallen to the supplicating

note, and that immediately, for our friend, made a difference and

reinstated him. They were in communication as they had been, that

first morning, in Sarah's salon and in her presence and Madame de

Vionnet's; and the same recognition of a great good will was again,

after all, possible. Only the amount of response Waymarsh had then

taken for granted was doubled, decupled now. This came out when he

presently said: "Of course I needn't assure you I hope you'll

come with us." Then it was that his implications and expectations

loomed up for Strether as almost pathetically gross.

The latter patted his shoulder while he thanked him, giving the

go-by to the question of joining the Pococks; he expressed the joy he

felt at seeing him go forth again so brave and free, and he in fact

almost took leave of him on the spot. "I shall see you again of

course before you go; but I'm meanwhile much obliged to you for

arranging so conveniently for what you've told me. I shall walk up

and down in the court there--dear little old court which we've each

bepaced so, this last couple of months, to the tune of our flights

and our drops, our hesitations and our plunges: I shall hang about

there, all impatience and excitement, please let Sarah know, till

she graciously presents herself. Leave me with her without fear,"

he laughed; "I assure you I shan't hurt her. I don't think either

she'll hurt ME: I'm in a situation in which damage was some time

ago discounted. Besides, THAT isn't what worries you--but don't,

don't explain! We're all right as we are: which was the degree of

success our adventure was pledged to for each of us. We weren't,

it seemed, all right as we were before; and we've got over the

ground, all things considered, quickly. I hope you'll have a

lovely time in the Alps."

Waymarsh fairly looked up at him as from the foot of them. "I

don't know as I OUGHT really to go."

It was the conscience of Milrose in the very voice of Milrose, but,

oh it was feeble and flat! Strether suddenly felt quite ashamed for

him; he breathed a greater boldness. "LET yourself, on the

contrary, go--in all agreeable directions. These are precious

hours--at our age they mayn't recur. Don't have it to say to

yourself at Milrose, next winter, that you hadn't courage for

them." And then as his comrade queerly stared: "Live up to Mrs.

Pocock."

"Live up to her?"

"You're a great help to her."

Waymarsh looked at it as at one of the uncomfortable things that

were certainly true and that it was yet ironical to say. "It's

more then than you are."

"That's exactly your own chance and advantage. Besides," said

Strether, "I do in my way contribute. I know what I'm about."

Waymarsh had kept on his great panama, and, as he now stood nearer

the door, his last look beneath the shade of it had turned again to

darkness and warning. "So do I! See here, Strether."

"I know what you're going to say. 'Quit this'?"

"Quit this!" But it lacked its old intensity; nothing of it

remained; it went out of the room with him.

III

Almost the first thing, strangely enough, that, about an hour

later, Strether found himself doing in Sarah's presence was to

remark articulately on this failure, in their friend, of what had

been superficially his great distinction. It was as if--he alluded

of course to the grand manner--the dear man had sacrificed it to

some other advantage; which would be of course only for himself to

measure. It might be simply that he was physically so much more

sound than on his first coming out; this was all prosaic,

comparatively cheerful and vulgar. And fortunately, if one came to

that, his improvement in health was really itself grander than any

manner it could be conceived as having cost him. "You yourself

alone, dear Sarah"--Strether took the plunge--"have done him, it

strikes me, in these three weeks, as much good as all the rest of

his time together."

It was a plunge because somehow the range of reference was, in the

conditions, "funny," and made funnier still by Sarah's attitude, by

the turn the occasion had, with her appearance, so sensibly taken.

Her appearance was really indeed funnier than anything else--the

spirit in which he felt her to be there as soon as she was there,

the shade of obscurity that cleared up for him as soon as he was

seated with her in the small salon de lecture that had, for the

most part, in all the weeks, witnessed the wane of his early

vivacity of discussion with Waymarsh. It was an immense thing,

quite a tremendous thing, for her to have come: this truth opened

out to him in spite of his having already arrived for himself at a

fairly vivid view of it. He had done exactly what he had given

Waymarsh his word for--had walked and re-walked the court while he

awaited her advent; acquiring in this exercise an amount of light

that affected him at the time as flooding the scene. She had

decided upon the step in order to give him the benefit of a doubt,

in order to be able to say to her mother that she had, even to

abjectness, smoothed the way for him. The doubt had been as to

whether he mightn't take her as not having smoothed it--and the

admonition had possibly come from Waymarsh's more detached spirit.

Waymarsh had at any rate, certainly, thrown his weight into the

scale--he had pointed to the importance of depriving their friend

of a grievance. She had done justice to the plea, and it was to

set herself right with a high ideal that she actually sat there in

her state. Her calculation was sharp in the immobility with which

she held her tall parasol-stick upright and at arm's length, quite

as if she had struck the place to plant her flag; in the separate

precautions she took not to show as nervous; in the aggressive

repose in which she did quite nothing but wait for him. Doubt

ceased to be possible from the moment he had taken in that she had

arrived with no proposal whatever; that her concern was simply to

show what she had come to receive. She had come to receive his

submission, and Waymarsh was to have made it plain to him that she

would expect nothing less. He saw fifty things, her host, at this

convenient stage; but one of those he most saw was that their

anxious friend hadn't quite had the hand required of him.

Waymarsh HAD, however, uttered the request that she might find him

mild, and while hanging about the court before her arrival he had

turned over with zeal the different ways in which he could be so.

The difficulty was that if he was mild he wasn't, for her purpose,

conscious. If she wished him conscious--as everything about her

cried aloud that she did--she must accordingly be at costs to make

him so. Conscious he was, for himself--but only of too many

things; so she must choose the one she required.

Practically, however, it at last got itself named, and when once

that had happened they were quite at the centre of their situation.

One thing had really done as well as another; when Strether had

spoken of Waymarsh's leaving him, and that had necessarily brought

on a reference to Mrs. Pocock's similar intention, the jump was but

short to supreme lucidity. Light became indeed after that so

intense that Strether would doubtless have but half made out, in

the prodigious glare, by which of the two the issue had been in

fact precipitated. It was, in their contracted quarters, as much

there between them as if it had been something suddenly spilled

with a crash and a splash on the floor. The form of his submission

was to be an engagement to acquit himself within the twenty-four

hours. "He'll go in a moment if you give him the word--he assures

me on his honour he'll do that": this came in its order, out of

its order, in respect to Chad, after the crash had occurred. It

came repeatedly during the time taken by Strether to feel that he

was even more fixed in his rigour than he had supposed--the time he

was not above adding to a little by telling her that such a way of

putting it on her brother's part left him sufficiently surprised.

She wasn't at all funny at last--she was really fine; and he felt

easily where she was strong--strong for herself. It hadn't yet so

come home to him that she was nobly and appointedly officious.

She was acting in interests grander and clearer than that of her

poor little personal, poor little Parisian equilibrium, and all his

consciousness of her mother's moral pressure profited by this proof

of its sustaining force. She would be held up; she would be

strengthened; he needn't in the least be anxious for her.

What would once more have been distinct to him had he tried to

make it so was that, as Mrs. Newsome was essentially all moral pressure,

the presence of this element was almost identical with her own presence.

It wasn't perhaps that he felt he was dealing with her straight,

but it was certainly as if she had been dealing straight with HIM.

She was reaching him somehow by the lengthened arm of the spirit,

and he was having to that extent to take her into account;

but he wasn't reaching her in turn, not making her take HIM;

he was only reaching Sarah, who appeared to take so little of him.

"Something has clearly passed between you and Chad," he presently said,

"that I think I ought to know something more about. Does he put it all,"

he smiled, "on me?"

"Did you come out," she asked, "to put it all on HIM?"

But he replied to this no further than, after an instant, by

saying: "Oh it's all right. Chad I mean's all right in having

said to you--well anything he may have said. I'll TAKE it all--

what he does put on me. Only I must see him before I see you

again."

She hesitated, but she brought it out. "Is it absolutely necessary

you should see me again?"

"Certainly, if I'm to give you any definite word about anything."

"Is it your idea then," she returned, "that I shall keep on meeting

you only to be exposed to fresh humiliation?"

He fixed her a longer time. "Are your instructions from

Mrs. Newsome that you shall, even at the worst, absolutely and

irretrievably break with me?"

"My instructions from Mrs. Newsome are, if you please, my affair.

You know perfectly what your own were, and you can judge for

yourself of what it can do for you to have made what you have of

them. You can perfectly see, at any rate, I'll go so far as to

say, that if I wish not to expose myself I must wish still less to

expose HER." She had already said more than she had quite

expected; but, though she had also pulled up, the colour in her

face showed him he should from one moment to the other have it all.

He now indeed felt the high importance of his having it. "What is

your conduct," she broke out as if to explain--"what is your

conduct but an outrage to women like US? I mean your acting as if

there can be a doubt--as between us and such another--of his duty?"

He thought a moment. It was rather much to deal with at once; not

only the question itself, but the sore abysses it revealed.

"Of course they're totally different kinds of duty."

"And do you pretend that he has any at all--to such another?"

"Do you mean to Madame de Vionnet?" He uttered the name not to

affront her, but yet again to gain time--time that he needed for

taking in something still other and larger than her demand of a

moment before. It wasn't at once that he could see all that was

in her actual challenge; but when he did he found himself just

checking a low vague sound, a sound which was perhaps the nearest

approach his vocal chords had ever known to a growl. Everything

Mrs. Pocock had failed to give a sign of recognising in Chad as a

particular part of a transformation--everything that had lent

intention to this particular failure--affected him as gathered into

a large loose bundle and thrown, in her words, into his face. The

missile made him to that extent catch his breath; which however he

presently recovered. "Why when a woman's at once so charming and

so beneficent--"

"You can sacrifice mothers and sisters to her without a blush and

can make them cross the ocean on purpose to feel the more and take

from you the straighter, HOW you do it?"

Yes, she had taken him up as short and as sharply as that, but he

tried not to flounder in her grasp. "I don't think there's

anything I've done in any such calculated way as you describe.

Everything has come as a sort of indistinguishable part of

everything else. Your coming out belonged closely to my having

come before you, and my having come was a result of our general

state of mind. Our general state of mind had proceeded, on its

side, from our queer ignorance, our queer misconceptions and

confusions--from which, since then, an inexorable tide of light

seems to have floated us into our perhaps still queerer knowledge.

Don't you LIKE your brother as he is," he went on, "and haven't

you given your mother an intelligible account of all that that

comes to?"

It put to her also, doubtless, his own tone, too many things, this

at least would have been the case hadn't his final challenge

directly helped her. Everything, at the stage they had reached,

directly helped her, because everything betrayed in him such a

basis of intention. He saw--the odd way things came out!--that he

would have been held less monstrous had he only been a little

wilder. What exposed him was just his poor old trick of quiet

inwardness, what exposed him was his THINKING such offence. He hadn't

in the least however the desire to irritate that Sarah imputed to him,

and he could only at last temporise, for the moment, with her

indignant view. She was altogether more inflamed than he had

expected, and he would probably understand this better when he

should learn what had occurred for her with Chad. Till then her

view of his particular blackness, her clear surprise at his not

clutching the pole she held out, must pass as extravagant. "I

leave you to flatter yourself," she returned, "that what you speak

of is what YOU'VE beautifully done. When a thing has been already

described in such a lovely way--!" But she caught herself up, and

her comment on his description rang out sufficiently loud. "Do you

consider her even an apology for a decent woman?"

Ah there it was at last! She put the matter more crudely than, for

his own mixed purposes, he had yet had to do; but essentially it

was all one matter. It was so much--so much; and she treated it,

poor lady, as so little. He grew conscious, as he was now apt to

do, of a strange smile, and the next moment he found himself

talking like Miss Barrace. "She has struck me from the first as

wonderful. I've been thinking too moreover that, after all, she

would probably have represented even for yourself something rather

new and rather good."

He was to have given Mrs. Pocock with this, however, but her best

opportunity for a sound of derision. "Rather new? I hope so with

all my heart!"

"I mean," he explained, "that she might have affected you by her

exquisite amiability--a real revelation, it has seemed to myself;

her high rarity, her distinction of every sort."

He had been, with these words, consciously a little "precious"; but

he had had to be--he couldn't give her the truth of the case

without them; and it seemed to him moreover now that he didn't

care. He had at all events not served his cause, for she sprang at

its exposed side. "A 'revelation'--to ME: I've come to such a

woman for a revelation? You talk to me about 'distinction'--

YOU, you who've had your privilege?--when the most distinguished woman

we shall either of us have seen in this world sits there insulted,

in her loneliness, by your incredible comparison!"

Strether forbore, with an effort, from straying; but he looked all

about him. "Does your mother herself make the point that she

sits insulted?"

Sarah's answer came so straight, so "pat," as might have been said,

that he felt on the instant its origin. "She has confided to my

judgement and my tenderness the expression of her personal sense of

everything, and the assertion of her personal dignity."

They were the very words of the lady of Woollett--he would have

known them in a thousand; her parting charge to her child. Mrs.

Pocock accordingly spoke to this extent by book, and the fact

immensely moved him. "If she does really feel as you say it's of

course very very dreadful. I've given sufficient proof, one would

have thought," he added, "of my deep admiration for Mrs. Newsome."

"And pray what proof would one have thought you'd CALL sufficient?

That of thinking this person here so far superior to her?"

He wondered again; he waited. "Ah dear Sarah, you must LEAVE me

this person here!"

In his desire to avoid all vulgar retorts, to show how, even

perversely, he clung to his rag of reason, he had softly almost

wailed this plea. Yet he knew it to be perhaps the most positive

declaration he had ever made in his life, and his visitor's

reception of it virtually gave it that importance. "That's exactly

what I'm delighted to do. God knows WE don't want her! You take

good care not to meet," she observed in a still higher key,

"my question about their life. If you do consider it a thing

one can even SPEAK of, I congratulate you on your taste!"

The life she alluded to was of course Chad's and Madame de Vionnet's,

which she thus bracketed together in a way that made him wince

a little; there being nothing for him but to take home her

full intention. It was none the less his inconsequence that while

he had himself been enjoying for weeks the view of the brilliant

woman's specific action, he just suffered from any characterisation

of it by other lips. "I think tremendously well of her, at the

same time that I seem to feel her 'life' to be really none of my

business. It's my business, that is, only so far as Chad's own

life is affected by it; and what has happened, don't you see? is

that Chad's has been affected so beautifully. The proof of the

pudding's in the eating"--he tried, with no great success, to help

it out with a touch of pleasantry, while she let him go on as if to

sink and sink. He went on however well enough, as well as he could

do without fresh counsel; he indeed shouldn't stand quite firm, he

felt, till he should have re-established his communications with

Chad. Still, he could always speak for the woman he had so

definitely promised to "save." This wasn't quite for her the air

of salvation; but as that chill fairly deepened what did it become

but a reminder that one might at the worst perish WITH her? And it

was simple enough--it was rudimentary: not, not to give her away.

"I find in her more merits than you would probably have patience

with my counting over. And do you know," he enquired, "the effect

you produce on me by alluding to her in such terms? It's as if you

had some motive in not recognising all she has done for your

brother, and so shut your eyes to each side of the matter, in

order, whichever side comes up, to get rid of the other. I don't,

you must allow me to say, see how you can with any pretence to

candour get rid of the side nearest you."

"Near me--THAT sort of thing?" And Sarah gave a jerk back of her

head that well might have nullified any active proximity.

It kept her friend himself at his distance, and he respected for a

moment the interval. Then with a last persuasive effort he bridged

it. "You don't, on your honour, appreciate Chad's fortunate

development?"

"Fortunate?" she echoed again. And indeed she was prepared.

"I call it hideous."

Her departure had been for some minutes marked as imminent, and she

was already at the door that stood open to the court, from the

threshold of which she delivered herself of this judgement. It

rang out so loud as to produce for the time the hush of everything

else. Strether quite, as an effect of it, breathed less bravely;

he could acknowledge it, but simply enough. "Oh if you think THAT--!"

"Then all's at an end? So much the better. I do think that!" She

passed out as she spoke and took her way straight across the court,

beyond which, separated from them by the deep arch of the

porte-cochere the low victoria that had conveyed her from her own hotel

was drawn up. She made for it with decision, and the manner of her

break, the sharp shaft of her rejoinder, had an intensity by which

Strether was at first kept in arrest. She had let fly at him as

from a stretched cord, and it took him a minute to recover from the

sense of being pierced. It was not the penetration of surprise;

it was that, much more, of certainty; his case being put for him as

he had as yet only put it to himself. She was away at any rate;

she had distanced him--with rather a grand spring, an effect of pride

and ease, after all; she had got into her carriage before he could

overtake her, and the vehicle was already in motion. He stopped

halfway; he stood there in the court only seeing her go and noting

that she gave him no other look. The way he had put it to himself

was that all quite MIGHT be at an end. Each of her movements,

in this resolute rupture, reaffirmed, re-enforced that idea.

Sarah passed out of sight in the sunny street while, planted there

in the centre of the comparatively grey court, he continued merely

to look before him. It probably WAS all at an end.

Book Eleventh

[Note: In the 1909 New York Edition the following two chapters were placed

in the reverse of the order appearing below. Since 1950, most scholars have

agreed, because of the internal evidence of the two chapters, that an

editorial error caused them to be printed in reverse order. This Etext,

like other editions of the past four decades, corrects the apparent error.

-- Richard D. Hathaway, preparer of this electronic text]

I

He went late that evening to the Boulevard Malesherbes, having his

impression that it would be vain to go early, and having also, more

than once in the course of the day, made enquiries of the concierge.

Chad hadn't come in and had left no intimation; he had affairs,

apparently, at this juncture--as it occurred to Strether he so well

might have--that kept him long abroad. Our friend asked once for

him at the hotel in the Rue de Rivoli, but the only contribution

offered there was the fact that every one was out. It was with

the idea that he would have to come home to sleep that Strether

went up to his rooms, from which however he was still absent, though,

from the balcony, a few moments later, his visitor heard eleven

o'clock strike. Chad's servant had by this time answered for his

reappearance; he HAD, the visitor learned, come quickly in to dress

for dinner and vanish again. Strether spent an hour in waiting

for him--an hour full of strange suggestions, persuasions, recognitions;

one of those that he was to recall, at the end of his adventure, as

the particular handful that most had counted. The mellowest lamplight

and the easiest chair had been placed at his disposal by Baptiste,

subtlest of servants; the novel half-uncut, the novel lemon-coloured

and tender, with the ivory knife athwart it like the dagger in a

contadina's hair, had been pushed within the soft circle--a circle

which, for some reason, affected Strether as softer still after

the same Baptiste had remarked that in the absence of a further need

of anything by Monsieur he would betake himself to bed. The night

was hot and heavy and the single lamp sufficient; the great flare

of the lighted city, rising high, spending itself afar, played up

from the Boulevard and, through the vague vista of the successive

rooms, brought objects into view and added to their dignity.

Strether found himself in possession as he never yet had been;

he had been there alone, had turned over books and prints,

had invoked, in Chad's absence, the spirit of the place,

but never at the witching hour and never with a relish quite

so like a pang.

He spent a long time on the balcony; he hung over it as he had seen

little Bilham hang the day of his first approach, as he had seen

Mamie hang over her own the day little Bilham himself might have

seen her from below; he passed back into the rooms, the three that

occupied the front and that communicated by wide doors; and, while

he circulated and rested, tried to recover the impression that they

had made on him three months before, to catch again the voice in

which they had seemed then to speak to him. That voice, he had to

note, failed audibly to sound; which he took as the proof of all

the change in himself. He had heard, of old, only what he COULD

then hear; what he could do now was to think of three months ago as

a point in the far past. All voices had grown thicker and meant

more things; they crowded on him as he moved about--it was the way

they sounded together that wouldn't let him be still. He felt,

strangely, as sad as if he had come for some wrong, and yet as

excited as if he had come for some freedom. But the freedom was

what was most in the place and the hour, it was the freedom that

most brought him round again to the youth of his own that he had

long ago missed. He could have explained little enough to-day

either why he had missed it or why, after years and years, he

should care that he had; the main truth of the actual appeal of

everything was none the less that everything represented the

substance of his loss put it within reach, within touch, made it,

to a degree it had never been, an affair of the senses. That was

what it became for him at this singular time, the youth he had long

ago missed--a queer concrete presence, full of mystery, yet full of

reality, which he could handle, taste, smell, the deep breathing of

which he could positively hear. It was in the outside air as well

as within; it was in the long watch, from the balcony, in the

summer night, of the wide late life of Paris, the unceasing soft

quick rumble, below, of the little lighted carriages that, in the

press, always suggested the gamblers he had seen of old at Monte

Carlo pushing up to the tables. This image was before him when he

at last became aware that Chad was behind.

"She tells me you put it all on ME"--he had arrived after this

promptly enough at that information; which expressed the case

however quite as the young man appeared willing for the moment to

leave it. Other things, with this advantage of their virtually

having the night before them, came up for them, and had, as well,

the odd effect of making the occasion, instead of hurried and

feverish, one of the largest, loosest and easiest to which

Strether's whole adventure was to have treated him. He had been

pursuing Chad from an early hour and had overtaken him only now;

but now the delay was repaired by their being so exceptionally

confronted. They had foregathered enough of course in all the

various times; they had again and again, since that first night at

the theatre, been face to face over their question; but they had

never been so alone together as they were actually alone--their

talk hadn't yet been so supremely for themselves. And if many

things moreover passed before them, none passed more distinctly for

Strether than that striking truth about Chad of which he had been

so often moved to take note: the truth that everything came

happily back with him to his knowing how to live. It had been

seated in his pleased smile--a smile that pleased exactly in the

right degree--as his visitor turned round, on the balcony, to greet

his advent; his visitor in fact felt on the spot that there was

nothing their meeting would so much do as bear witness to that

facility. He surrendered himself accordingly to so approved a

gift; for what was the meaning of the facility but that others DID

surrender themselves? He didn't want, luckily, to prevent Chad

from living; but he was quite aware that even if he had he would

himself have thoroughly gone to pieces. It was in truth

essentially by bringing down his personal life to a function all

subsidiary to the young man's own that he held together. And the

great point, above all, the sign of how completely Chad possessed

the knowledge in question, was that one thus became, not only with

a proper cheerfulness, but with wild native impulses, the feeder of

his stream. Their talk had accordingly not lasted three minutes

without Strether's feeling basis enough for the excitement in which

he had waited. This overflow fairly deepened, wastefully abounded,

as he observed the smallness of anything corresponding to it on the

part of his friend. That was exactly this friend's happy case; he

"put out" his excitement, or whatever other emotion the matter

involved, as he put out his washing; than which no arrangement

could make more for domestic order. It was quite for Strether

himself in short to feel a personal analogy with the laundress

bringing home the triumphs of the mangle.

When he had reported on Sarah's visit, which he did very fully,

Chad answered his question with perfect candour. "I positively

referred her to you--told her she must absolutely see you. This was

last night, and it all took place in ten minutes. It was our first

free talk--really the first time she had tackled me. She knew I

also knew what her line had been with yourself; knew moreover how

little you had been doing to make anything difficult for her.

So I spoke for you frankly--assured her you were all at her service.

I assured her I was too," the young man continued; "and I pointed out

how she could perfectly, at any time, have got at me. Her difficulty

has been simply her not finding the moment she fancied."

"Her difficulty," Strether returned, "has been simply that she

finds she's afraid of you. She's not afraid of ME, Sarah, one

little scrap; and it was just because she has seen how I can fidget

when I give my mind to it that she has felt her best chance,

rightly enough to be in making me as uneasy as possible. I think

she's at bottom as pleased to HAVE you put it on me as you yourself

can possibly be to put it."

"But what in the world, my dear man," Chad enquired in objection to

this luminosity, "have I done to make Sally afraid?"

"You've been 'wonderful, wonderful,' as we say--we poor people who

watch the play from the pit; and that's what has, admirably, made

her. Made her all the more effectually that she could see you didn't

set about it on purpose--I mean set about affecting her as with fear."

Chad cast a pleasant backward glance over his possibilities of

motive. "I've only wanted to be kind and friendly, to be decent

and attentive--and I still only want to be."

Strether smiled at his comfortable clearness. "Well, there can

certainly be no way for it better than by my taking the onus. It

reduces your personal friction and your personal offence to almost

nothing."

Ah but Chad, with his completer conception of the friendly, wouldn't

quite have this! They had remained on the balcony, where, after their

day of great and premature heat, the midnight air was delicious;

and they leaned back in turn against the balustrade, all in harmony with

the chairs and the flower-pots, the cigarettes and the starlight.

"The onus isn't REALLY yours--after our agreeing so to wait together

and judge together. That was all my answer to Sally," Chad pursued--

"that we have been, that we are, just judging together."

"I'm not afraid of the burden," Strether explained; "I haven't

come in the least that you should take it off me. I've come very

much, it seems to me, to double up my fore legs in the manner of

the camel when he gets down on his knees to make his back convenient.

But I've supposed you all this while to have been doing a lot of

special and private judging--about which I haven't troubled you;

and I've only wished to have your conclusion first from you.

I don't ask more than that; I'm quite ready to take it as it has come."

Chad turned up his face to the sky with a slow puff of his smoke.

"Well, I've seen."

Strether waited a little. "I've left you wholly alone; haven't, I

think I may say, since the first hour or two--when I merely

preached patience--so much as breathed on you."

"Oh you've been awfully good!"

"We've both been good then--we've played the game. We've given

them the most liberal conditions."

"Ah," said Chad, "splendid conditions! It was open to them, open

to them"--he seemed to make it out, as he smoked, with his eyes

still on the stars. He might in quiet sport have been reading

their horoscope. Strether wondered meanwhile what had been open to

them, and he finally let him have it. "It was open to them simply

to let me alone; to have made up their minds, on really seeing me

for themselves, that I could go on well enough as I was."

Strether assented to this proposition with full lucidity, his

companion's plural pronoun, which stood all for Mrs. Newsome and

her daughter, having no ambiguity for him. There was nothing,

apparently, to stand for Mamie and Jim; and this added to our

friend's sense of Chad's knowing what he thought. "But they've made

up their minds to the opposite--that you CAN'T go on as you are."

"No," Chad continued in the same way; "they won't have it for a minute."

Strether on his side also reflectively smoked. It was as if their

high place really represented some moral elevation from which they

could look down on their recent past. "There never was the

smallest chance, do you know, that they WOULD have it for a moment."

"Of course not--no real chance. But if they were willing to think

there was--!"

"They weren't willing." Strether had worked it all out. "It wasn't

for you they came out, but for me. It wasn't to see for themselves

what you're doing, but what I'm doing. The first branch of their

curiosity was inevitably destined, under my culpable delay, to give way

to the second; and it's on the second that, if I may use the expression

and you don't mind my marking the invidious fact, they've been of late

exclusively perched. When Sarah sailed it was me, in other words,

they were after."

Chad took it in both with intelligence and with indulgence. "It IS

rather a business then--what I've let you in for!"

Strether had again a brief pause; which ended in a reply that

seemed to dispose once for all of this element of compunction.

Chad was to treat it, at any rate, so far as they were again

together, as having done so. "I was 'in' when you found me."

"Ah but it was you," the young man laughed, "who found ME."

"I only found you out. It was you who found me in. It was all in

the day's work for them, at all events, that they should come. And

they've greatly enjoyed it," Strether declared.

"Well, I've tried to make them," said Chad.

His companion did himself presently the same justice. "So have I.

I tried even this very morning--while Mrs. Pocock was with me. She

enjoys for instance, almost as much as anything else, not being, as

I've said, afraid of me; and I think I gave her help in that."

Chad took a deeper interest. "Was she very very nasty?"

Strether debated. "Well, she was the most important thing--she was

definite. She was--at last--crystalline. And I felt no remorse.

I saw that they must have come."

"Oh I wanted to see them for myself; so that if it were only for

THAT--!" Chad's own remorse was as small.

This appeared almost all Strether wanted. "Isn't your having seen

them for yourself then THE thing, beyond all others, that has come

of their visit?"

Chad looked as if he thought it nice of his old friend to put it

so. "Don't you count it as anything that you're dished--if you ARE

dished? Are you, my dear man, dished?"

It sounded as if he were asking if he had caught cold or hurt his

foot, and Strether for a minute but smoked and smoked. "I want to

see her again. I must see her."

"Of course you must." Then Chad hesitated. "Do you mean--a--Mother

herself?"

"Oh your mother--that will depend."

It was as if Mrs. Newsome had somehow been placed by the words

very far off. Chad however endeavoured in spite of this to reach

the place. "What do you mean it will depend on?"

Strether, for all answer, gave him a longish look. "I was speaking

of Sarah. I must positively--though she quite cast me off--see HER

again. I can't part with her that way."

"Then she was awfully unpleasant?"

Again Strether exhaled. "She was what she had to be. I mean that

from the moment they're not delighted they can only be--well what I

admit she was. We gave them," he went on, "their chance to be

delighted, and they've walked up to it, and looked all round it,

and not taken it."

"You can bring a horse to water--!" Chad suggested.

"Precisely. And the tune to which this morning Sarah wasn't

delighted--the tune to which, to adopt your metaphor, she refused

to drink--leaves us on that side nothing more to hope."

Chad had a pause, and then as if consolingly: "It was never of

course really the least on the cards that they would be 'delighted.'"

"Well, I don't know, after all," Strether mused. "I've had to come

as far round. However"--he shook it off--"it's doubtless MY

performance that's absurd."

"There are certainly moments," said Chad, "when you seem to me too

good to be true. Yet if you are true," he added, "that seems to be

all that need concern me."

"I'm true, but I'm incredible. I'm fantastic and ridiculous--

I don't explain myself even TO myself. How can they then,"

Strether asked, "understand me? So I don't quarrel with them."

"I see. They quarrel," said Chad rather comfortably, "with US."

Strether noted once more the comfort, but his young friend had

already gone on. "I should feel greatly ashamed, all the same,

if I didn't put it before you again that you ought to think,

after all, tremendously well. I mean before giving up beyond recall--"

With which insistence, as from a certain delicacy, dropped.

Ah but Strether wanted it. "Say it all, say it all."

"Well, at your age, and with what--when all's said and done--

Mother might do for you and be for you."

Chad had said it all, from his natural scruple, only to that

extent; so that Strether after an instant himself took a hand.

"My absence of an assured future. The little I have to show toward

the power to take care of myself. The way, the wonderful way,

she would certainly take care of me. Her fortune, her kindness,

and the constant miracle of her having been disposed to go even so far.

Of course, of course"--he summed it up. "There are those sharp facts."

Chad had meanwhile thought of another still. "And don't you really

care--?"

His friend slowly turned round to him. "Will you go?"

"I'll go if you'll say you now consider I should. You know," he

went on, "I was ready six weeks ago."

"Ah," said Strether, "that was when you didn't know I wasn't!

You're ready at present because you do know it."

"That may be," Chad returned; "but all the same I'm sincere. You

talk about taking the whole thing on your shoulders, but in what

light do you regard me that you think me capable of letting you

pay?" Strether patted his arm, as they stood together against the

parapet, reassuringly--seeming to wish to contend that he HAD the

wherewithal; but it was again round this question of purchase and

price that the young man's sense of fairness continued to hover.

"What it literally comes to for you, if you'll pardon my putting it

so, is that you give up money. Possibly a good deal of money."

"Oh," Strether laughed, "if it were only just enough you'd still be

justified in putting it so! But I've on my side to remind you too

that YOU give up money; and more than 'possibly'--quite certainly,

as I should suppose--a good deal."

"True enough; but I've got a certain quantity," Chad returned after

a moment. "Whereas you, my dear man, you--"

"I can't be at all said"--Strether took him up--"to have a 'quantity'

certain or uncertain? Very true. Still, I shan't starve."

"Oh you mustn't STARVE!" Chad pacifically emphasised; and so, in

the pleasant conditions, they continued to talk; though there was,

for that matter, a pause in which the younger companion might have

been taken as weighing again the delicacy of his then and there

promising the elder some provision against the possibility just

mentioned. This, however, he presumably thought best not to do,

for at the end of another minute they had moved in quite a different

direction. Strether had broken in by returning to the subject of

Chad's passage with Sarah and enquiring if they had arrived, in the

event, at anything in the nature of a "scene." To this Chad replied

that they had on the contrary kept tremendously polite; adding moreover

that Sally was after all not the woman to have made the mistake of

not being. "Her hands are a good deal tied, you see. I got so,

from the first," he sagaciously observed, "the start of her."

"You mean she has taken so much from you?"

"Well, I couldn't of course in common decency give less: only she

hadn't expected, I think, that I'd give her nearly so much. And

she began to take it before she knew it."

"And she began to like it," said Strether, "as soon as she began to

take it!"

"Yes, she has liked it--also more than she expected." After which

Chad observed: "But she doesn't like ME. In fact she hates me."

Strether's interest grew. "Then why does she want you at home?"

"Because when you hate you want to triumph, and if she should get

me neatly stuck there she WOULD triumph."

Strether followed afresh, but looking as he went. "Certainly--in a

manner. But it would scarce be a triumph worth having if, once

entangled, feeling her dislike and possibly conscious in time of a

certain quantity of your own, you should on the spot make yourself

unpleasant to her."

"Ah," said Chad, "she can bear ME--could bear me at least at home.

It's my being there that would be her triumph. She hates me in Paris."

"She hates in other words--"

"Yes, THAT'S it!"--Chad had quickly understood this understanding;

which formed on the part of each as near an approach as they had

yet made to naming Madame de Vionnet. The limitations of their

distinctness didn't, however, prevent its fairly lingering in the

air that it was this lady Mrs. Pocock hated. It added one more

touch moreover to their established recognition of the rare intimacy

of Chad's association with her. He had never yet more twitched away

the last light veil from this phenomenon than in presenting himself

as confounded and submerged in the feeling she had created at Woollett.

"And I'll tell you who hates me too," he immediately went on.

Strether knew as immediately whom he meant, but with as prompt a

protest. "Ah no! Mamie doesn't hate--well," he caught himself in

time--"anybody at all. Mamie's beautiful."

Chad shook his head. "That's just why I mind it. She certainly

doesn't like me."

"How much do you mind it? What would you do for her?"

"Well, I'd like her if she'd like me. Really, really," Chad declared.

It gave his companion a moment's pause. "You asked me just now if

I don't, as you said, 'care' about a certain person. You rather

tempt me therefore to put the question in my turn. Don't YOU care

about a certain other person?"

Chad looked at him hard in the lamplight of the window. "The

difference is that I don't want to."

Strether wondered. "'Don't want' to?"

"I try not to--that is I HAVE tried. I've done my best. You can't

be surprised," the young man easily went on, "when you yourself set

me on it. I was indeed," he added, "already on it a little; but you

set me harder. It was six weeks ago that I thought I had come out."

Strether took it well in. "But you haven't come out!"

"I don't know--it's what I WANT to know," said Chad. "And if I

could have sufficiently wanted--by myself--to go back, I think I

might have found out."

"Possibly"--Strether considered. "But all you were able to achieve

was to want to want to! And even then," he pursued, "only till our

friends there came. Do you want to want to still?" As with a

sound half-dolorous, half-droll and all vague and equivocal, Chad

buried his face for a little in his hands, rubbing it in a

whimsical way that amounted to an evasion, he brought it out more

sharply: "DO you?"

Chad kept for a time his attitude, but at last he looked up, and

then abruptly, "Jim IS a damned dose!" he declared.

"Oh I don't ask you to abuse or describe or in any way pronounce on

your relatives; I simply put it to you once more whether you're NOW

ready. You say you've 'seen.' Is what you've seen that you can't

resist?"

Chad gave him a strange smile--the nearest approach he had ever

shown to a troubled one. "Can't you make me NOT resist?"

"What it comes to," Strether went on very gravely now and as if he

hadn't heard him, "what it comes to is that more has been done for

you, I think, than I've ever seen done--attempted perhaps, but

never so successfully done--by one human being for another."

"Oh an immense deal certainly"--Chad did it full justice. "And you

yourself are adding to it."

It was without heeding this either that his visitor continued.

"And our friends there won't have it."

"No, they simply won't."

"They demand you on the basis, as it were, of repudiation and

ingratitude; and what has been the matter with me," Strether went

on, "is that I haven't seen my way to working with you for

repudiation."

Chad appreciated this. "Then as you haven't seen yours you

naturally haven't seen mine. There it is." After which he

proceeded, with a certain abruptness, to a sharp interrogation.

"NOW do you say she doesn't hate me?"

Strether hesitated. "'She'--?"

"Yes--Mother. We called it Sarah, but it comes to the same thing."

"Ah," Strether objected, "not to the same thing as her hating YOU."

On which--though as if for an instant it had hung fire--Chad

remarkably replied: "Well, if they hate my good friend, THAT comes

to the same thing." It had a note of inevitable truth that made

Strether take it as enough, feel he wanted nothing more. The young

man spoke in it for his "good friend" more than he had ever yet

directly spoken, confessed to such deep identities between them as

he might play with the idea of working free from, but which at a

given moment could still draw him down like a whirlpool. And

meanwhile he had gone on. "Their hating you too moreover--that

also comes to a good deal."

"Ah," said Strether, "your mother doesn't."

Chad, however, loyally stuck to it--loyally, that is, to Strether.

"She will if you don't look out."

"Well, I do look out. I am, after all, looking out. That's just

why," our friend explained, "I want to see her again."

It drew from Chad again the same question. "To see Mother?"

"To see--for the present--Sarah."

"Ah then there you are! And what I don't for the life of me make

out," Chad pursued with resigned perplexity, "is what you GAIN by it."

Oh it would have taken his companion too long to say! "That's

because you have, I verily believe, no imagination. You've other

qualities. But no imagination, don't you see? at all."

"I dare say. I do see." It was an idea in which Chad showed

interest. "But haven't you yourself rather too much?"

"Oh RATHER--!" So that after an instant, under this reproach and

as if it were at last a fact really to escape from, Strether made

his move for departure.

II

One of the features of the restless afternoon passed by him after

Mrs. Pocock's visit was an hour spent, shortly before dinner, with

Maria Gostrey, whom of late, in spite of so sustained a call on his

attention from other quarters, he had by no means neglected. And

that he was still not neglecting her will appear from the fact that

he was with her again at the same hour on the very morrow--with no

less fine a consciousness moreover of being able to hold her ear.

It continued inveterately to occur, for that matter, that whenever

he had taken one of his greater turns he came back to where she so

faithfully awaited him. None of these excursions had on the whole

been livelier than the pair of incidents--the fruit of the short

interval since his previous visit--on which he had now to report to

her. He had seen Chad Newsome late the night before, and he had

had that morning, as a sequel to this conversation, a second

interview with Sarah. "But they're all off," he said, "at last."

It puzzled her a moment. "All?--Mr. Newsome with them?"

"Ah not yet! Sarah and Jim and Mamie. But Waymarsh with them--

for Sarah. It's too beautiful," Strether continued; "I find I don't

get over that--it's always a fresh joy. But it's a fresh joy too,"

he added, "that--well, what do you think? Little Bilham also goes.

But he of course goes for Mamie."

Miss Gostrey wondered. "'For' her? Do you mean they're already

engaged?"

"Well," said Strether, "say then for ME. He'll do anything for me;

just as I will, for that matter--anything I can--for him. Or for

Mamie either. SHE'LL do anything for me."

Miss Gostrey gave a comprehensive sigh. "The way you reduce people

to subjection!"

"It's certainly, on one side, wonderful. But it's quite equalled,

on another, by the way I don't. I haven't reduced Sarah, since

yesterday; though I've succeeded in seeing her again, as I'll

presently tell you. The others however are really all right.

Mamie, by that blessed law of ours, absolutely must have a young

man."

"But what must poor Mr. Bilham have? Do you mean they'll MARRY

for you?"

"I mean that, by the same blessed law, it won't matter a grain if

they don't--I shan't have in the least to worry."

She saw as usual what he meant. "And Mr. Jim?--who goes for him?"

"Oh," Strether had to admit, "I couldn't manage THAT. He's

thrown, as usual, on the world; the world which, after all, by his

account--for he has prodigious adventures--seems very good to him.

He fortunately--'over here,' as he says--finds the world

everywhere; and his most prodigious adventure of all," he went on,

"has been of course of the last few days."

Miss Gostrey, already knowing, instantly made the connexion. "He

has seen Marie de Vionnet again?"

"He went, all by himself, the day after Chad's party--didn't I

tell you?--to tea with her. By her invitation--all alone."

"Quite like yourself!" Maria smiled.

"Oh but he's more wonderful about her than I am!" And then as his

friend showed how she could believe it, filling it out, fitting it

on to old memories of the wonderful woman: "What I should have

liked to manage would have been HER going."

"To Switzerland with the party?"

"For Jim--and for symmetry. If it had been workable moreover for

a fortnight she'd have gone. She's ready"--he followed up his

renewed vision of her--"for anything."

Miss Gostrey went with him a minute. "She's too perfect!"

"She WILL, I think," he pursued, "go to-night to the station."

"To see him off?"

"With Chad--marvellously--as part of their general attention. And

she does it"--it kept before him--"with a light, light grace, a

free, free gaiety, that may well softly bewilder Mr. Pocock."

It kept her so before him that his companion had after an instant a

friendly comment. "As in short it has softly bewildered a saner

man. Are you really in love with her?" Maria threw off.

"It's of no importance I should know," he replied. "It matters so

little--has nothing to do, practically, with either of us."

"All the same"--Maria continued to smile--"they go, the five, as I

understand you, and you and Madame de Vionnet stay."

"Oh and Chad." To which Strether added: "And you."

"Ah 'me'!"--she gave a small impatient wail again, in which

something of the unreconciled seemed suddenly to break out. "I

don't stay, it somehow seems to me, much to my advantage. In the

presence of all you cause to pass before me I've a tremendous sense

of privation."

Strether hesitated. "But your privation, your keeping out of

everything, has been--hasn't it?--by your own choice."

"Oh yes; it has been necessary--that is it has been better for you.

What I mean is only that I seem to have ceased to serve you."

"How can you tell that?" he asked. "You don't know how you serve me.

When you cease--"

"Well?" she said as he dropped.

"Well, I'll LET you know. Be quiet till then."

She thought a moment. "Then you positively like me to stay?"

"Don't I treat you as if I did?"

"You're certainly very kind to me. But that," said Maria, "is for

myself. It's getting late, as you see, and Paris turning rather

hot and dusty. People are scattering, and some of them, in other

places want me. But if you want me here--!"

She had spoken as resigned to his word, but he had of a sudden a

still sharper sense than he would have expected of desiring not to

lose her. "I want you here."

She took it as if the words were all she had wished; as if they

brought her, gave her something that was the compensation of her

case. "Thank you," she simply answered. And then as he looked at

her a little harder, "Thank you very much," she repeated.

It had broken as with a slight arrest into the current of their

talk, and it held him a moment longer. "Why, two months, or

whatever the time was, ago, did you so suddenly dash off? The

reason you afterwards gave me for having kept away three weeks wasn't

the real one."

She recalled. "I never supposed you believed it was. Yet," she

continued, "if you didn't guess it that was just what helped you."

He looked away from her on this; he indulged, so far as space

permitted, in one of his slow absences. "I've often thought of it,

but never to feel that I could guess it. And you see the

consideration with which I've treated you in never asking till now."

"Now then why DO you ask?"

"To show you how I miss you when you're not here, and what it does

for me."

"It doesn't seem to have done," she laughed, "all it might!

However," she added, "if you've really never guessed the truth I'll

tell it you."

"I've never guessed it," Strether declared.

"Never?"

"Never."

"Well then I dashed off, as you say, so as not to have the

confusion of being there if Marie de Vionnet should tell you

anything to my detriment."

He looked as if he considerably doubted. "You even then would have

had to face it on your return."

"Oh if I had found reason to believe it something very bad I'd have

left you altogether."

"So then," he continued, "it was only on guessing she had been on

the whole merciful that you ventured back?"

Maria kept it together. "I owe her thanks. Whatever her temptation

she didn't separate us. That's one of my reasons," she went on

"for admiring her so."

"Let it pass then," said Strether, "for one of mine as well. But

what would have been her temptation?"

"What are ever the temptations of women?"

He thought--but hadn't, naturally, to think too long. "Men?"

"She would have had you, with it, more for herself. But she saw

she could have you without it."

"Oh 'have' me!" Strether a trifle ambiguously sighed. "YOU," he

handsomely declared, "would have had me at any rate WITH it."

"Oh 'have' you!"--she echoed it as he had done. "I do have you,

however," she less ironically said, "from the moment you express a

wish."

He stopped before her, full of the disposition. "I'll express fifty."

Which indeed begot in her, with a certain inconsequence, a return

of her small wail. "Ah there you are!"

There, if it were so, he continued for the rest of the time to be,

and it was as if to show her how she could still serve him that,

coming back to the departure of the Pococks, he gave her the view,

vivid with a hundred more touches than we can reproduce, of what

had happened for him that morning. He had had ten minutes with

Sarah at her hotel, ten minutes reconquered, by irresistible pressure,

from the time over which he had already described her to Miss Gostrey

as having, at the end of their interview on his own premises, passed

the great sponge of the future. He had caught her by not announcing

himself, had found her in her sitting-room with a dressmaker and a

lingere whose accounts she appeared to have been more or less

ingenuously settling and who soon withdrew. Then he had explained

to her how he had succeeded, late the night before, in keeping

his promise of seeing Chad. "I told her I'd take it all."

"You'd 'take' it?"

"Why if he doesn't go."

Maria waited. "And who takes it if he does?" she enquired with a

certain grimness of gaiety.

"Well," said Strether, "I think I take, in any event, everything."

"By which I suppose you mean," his companion brought out after a

moment, "that you definitely understand you now lose everything."

He stood before her again. "It does come perhaps to the same

thing. But Chad, now that he has seen, doesn't really want it."

She could believe that, but she made, as always, for clearness.

"Still, what, after all, HAS he seen?"

"What they want of him. And it's enough."

"It contrasts so unfavourably with what Madame de Vionnet wants?"

"It contrasts--just so; all round, and tremendously."

"Therefore, perhaps, most of all with what YOU want?"

"Oh," said Strether, "what I want is a thing I've ceased to measure

or even to understand."

But his friend none the less went on. "Do you want Mrs. Newsome--

after such a way of treating you?"

It was a straighter mode of dealing with this lady than they had as

yet--such was their high form--permitted themselves; but it seemed

not wholly for this that he delayed a moment. "I dare say it has

been, after all, the only way she could have imagined."

"And does that make you want her any more?"

"I've tremendously disappointed her," Strether thought it worth

while to mention.

"Of course you have. That's rudimentary; that was plain to us long

ago. But isn't it almost as plain," Maria went on, "that you've

even yet your straight remedy? Really drag him away, as I believe

you still can, and you'd cease to have to count with her

disappointment."

"Ah then," he laughed, "I should have to count with yours!"

But this barely struck her now. "What, in that case, should you

call counting? You haven't come out where you are, I think, to

please ME."

"Oh," he insisted, "that too, you know, has been part of it.

I can't separate--it's all one; and that's perhaps why, as I say,

I don't understand." But he was ready to declare again that this

didn't in the least matter; all the more that, as he affirmed,

he HADn't really as yet "come out." "She gives me after all, on

its coming to the pinch, a last mercy, another chance. They don't

sail, you see, for five or six weeks more, and they haven't--she

admits that--expected Chad would take part in their tour. It's

still open to him to join them, at the last, at Liverpool."

Miss Gostrey considered. "How in the world is it 'open' unless you

open it? How can he join them at Liverpool if he but sinks deeper

into his situation here?"

"He has given her--as I explained to you that she let me know

yesterday--his word of honour to do as I say."

Maria stared. "But if you say nothing!"

Well, he as usual walked about on it. "I did say something this

morning. I gave her my answer--the word I had promised her after

hearing from himself what HE had promised. What she demanded of

me yesterday, you'll remember, was the engagement then and there to

make him take up this vow."

"Well then," Miss Gostrey enquired, "was the purpose of your visit

to her only to decline?"

"No; it was to ask, odd as that may seem to you, for another delay."

"Ah that's weak!"

"Precisely!" She had spoken with impatience, but, so far as that

at least, he knew where he was. "If I AM weak I want to find it

out. If I don't find it out I shall have the comfort, the little

glory, of thinking I'm strong."

"It's all the comfort, I judge," she returned, "that you WILL have!"

"At any rate," he said, "it will have been a month more. Paris may

grow, from day to day, hot and dusty, as you say; but there are

other things that are hotter and dustier. I'm not afraid to stay

on; the summer here must be amusing in a wild--if it isn't a tame--

way of its own; the place at no time more picturesque. I think I

shall like it. And then," he benevolently smiled for her, "there

will be always you."

"Oh," she objected, "it won't be as a part of the picturesqueness

that I shall stay, for I shall be the plainest thing about you.

You may, you see, at any rate," she pursued, "have nobody else.

Madame de Vionnet may very well be going off, mayn't she?--and

Mr. Newsome by the same stroke: unless indeed you've had an assurance

from them to the contrary. So that if your idea's to stay for them"--

it was her duty to suggest it--"you may be left in the lurch.

Of course if they do stay"--she kept it up--"they would be part of

the picturesqueness. Or else indeed you might join them somewhere."

Strether seemed to face it as if it were a happy thought; but the

next moment he spoke more critically. "Do you mean that they'll

probably go off together?"

She just considered. "I think it will be treating you quite

without ceremony if they do; though after all," she added, "it

would be difficult to see now quite what degree of ceremony properly

meets your case."

"Of course," Strether conceded, "my attitude toward them is extraordinary."

"Just so; so that one may ask one's self what style of proceeding

on their own part can altogether match it. The attitude of their

own that won't pale in its light they've doubtless still to work

out. The really handsome thing perhaps," she presently threw off,

"WOULD be for them to withdraw into more secluded conditions,

offering at the same time to share them with you." He looked at

her, on this, as if some generous irritation--all in his interest--

had suddenly again flickered in her; and what she next said indeed

half-explained it. "Don't really be afraid to tell me if what now

holds you IS the pleasant prospect of the empty town, with plenty

of seats in the shade, cool drinks, deserted museums, drives to the

Bois in the evening, and our wonderful woman all to yourself." And

she kept it up still more. "The handsomest thing of ALL, when one

makes it out, would, I dare say, be that Mr. Chad should for a

while go off by himself. It's a pity, from that point of view,"

she wound up, "that he doesn't pay his mother a visit. It would

at least occupy your interval." The thought in fact held her a

moment. "Why doesn't he pay his mother a visit? Even a week, at

this good moment, would do."

"My dear lady," Strether replied--and he had it even to himself

surprisingly ready--"my dear lady, his mother has paid HIM a visit.

Mrs. Newsome has been with him, this month, with an intensity that

I'm sure he has thoroughly felt; he has lavishly entertained her,

and she has let him have her thanks. Do you suggest he shall go

back for more of them?"

Well, she succeeded after a little in shaking it off. "I see.

It's what you don't suggest--what you haven't suggested.

And you know."

"So would you, my dear," he kindly said, "if you had so much as

seen her."

"As seen Mrs. Newsome?"

"No, Sarah--which, both for Chad and for myself, has served all

the purpose."

"And served it in a manner," she responsively mused, "so extraordinary!"

"Well, you see," he partly explained, "what it comes to is that she's

all cold thought--which Sarah could serve to us cold without its

really losing anything. So it is that we know what she thinks of us."

Maria had followed, but she had an arrest. "What I've never made

out, if you come to that, is what you think--I mean you personally--

of HER. Don't you so much, when all's said, as care a little?"

"That," he answered with no loss of promptness, "is what even Chad

himself asked me last night. He asked me if I don't mind the loss--

well, the loss of an opulent future. Which moreover," he hastened

to add, "was a perfectly natural question."

"I call your attention, all the same," said Miss Gostrey, "to the

fact that I don't ask it. What I venture to ask is whether it's to

Mrs. Newsome herself that you're indifferent."

"I haven't been so"--he spoke with all assurance. "I've been the

very opposite. I've been, from the first moment, preoccupied with

the impression everything might be making on her--quite oppressed,

haunted, tormented by it. I've been interested ONLY in her seeing

what I've seen. And I've been as disappointed in her refusal to

see it as she has been in what has appeared to her the perversity

of my insistence."

"Do you mean that she has shocked you as you've shocked her?"

Strether weighed it. "I'm probably not so shockable. But on the

other hand I've gone much further to meet her. She, on her side,

hasn't budged an inch."

"So that you're now at last"--Maria pointed the moral--"in the sad

stage of recriminations."

"No--it's only to you I speak. I've been like a lamb to Sarah.

I've only put my back to the wall. It's to THAT one naturally

staggers when one has been violently pushed there."

She watched him a moment. "Thrown over?"

"Well, as I feel I've landed somewhere I think I must have been thrown."

She turned it over, but as hoping to clarify much rather than to

harmonise. "The thing is that I suppose you've been disappointing--"

"Quite from the very first of my arrival? I dare say. I admit I

was surprising even to myself."

"And then of course," Maria went on, "I had much to do with it."

"With my being surprising--?"

"That will do," she laughed, "if you're too delicate to call it MY

being! Naturally," she added, "you came over more or less for

surprises."

"Naturally!"--he valued the reminder.

"But they were to have been all for you"--she continued to piece it

out--"and none of them for HER."

Once more he stopped before her as if she had touched the point.

"That's just her difficulty--that she doesn't admit surprises.

It's a fact that, I think, describes and represents her; and it

falls in with what I tell you--that she's all, as I've called it,

fine cold thought. She had, to her own mind, worked the whole

thing out in advance, and worked it out for me as well as for

herself. Whenever she has done that, you see, there's no room

left; no margin, as it were, for any alteration. She's filled as

full, packed as tight, as she'll hold and if you wish to get

anything more or different either out or in--"

"You've got to make over altogether the woman herself?"

"What it comes to," said Strether, "is that you've got morally and

intellectually to get rid of her."

"Which would appear," Maria returned, "to be practically what

you've done."

But her friend threw back his head. "I haven't touched her. She

won't BE touched. I see it now as I've never done; and she hangs

together with a perfection of her own," he went on, "that does

suggest a kind of wrong in ANY change of her composition. It was

at any rate," he wound up, "the woman herself, as you call her the

whole moral and intellectual being or block, that Sarah brought me

over to take or to leave."

It turned Miss Gostrey to deeper thought. "Fancy having to take at the

point of the bayonet a whole moral and intellectual being or block!"

"It was in fact," said Strether, "what, at home, I HAD done.

But somehow over there I didn't quite know it."

"One never does, I suppose," Miss Gostrey concurred, "realise in

advance, in such a case, the size, as you may say, of the block.

Little by little it looms up. It has been looming for you more and

more till at last you see it all."

"I see it all," he absently echoed, while his eyes might have been

fixing some particularly large iceberg in a cool blue northern sea.

"It's magnificent!" he then rather oddly exclaimed.

But his friend, who was used to this kind of inconsequence in him,

kept the thread. "There's nothing so magnificent--for making

others feel you--as to have no imagination."

It brought him straight round. "Ah there you are! It's what I said

last night to Chad. That he himself, I mean, has none."

"Then it would appear," Maria suggested, "that he has, after all,

something in common with his mother."

"He has in common that he makes one, as you say, 'feel' him. And

yet," he added, as if the question were interesting, "one feels

others too, even when they have plenty."

Miss Gostrey continued suggestive. "Madame de Vionnet?"

"SHE has plenty."

"Certainly--she had quantities of old. But there are different

ways of making one's self felt."

"Yes, it comes, no doubt, to that. You now--'

He was benevolently going on, but she wouldn't have it.

"Oh I DON'T make myself felt; so my quantity needn't be settled.

Yours, you know," she said, "is monstrous. No one has ever had so much."

It struck him for a moment. "That's what Chad also thinks."

"There YOU are then--though it isn't for him to complain of it!"

"Oh he doesn't complain of it," said Strether.

"That's all that would be wanting! But apropos of what," Maria went

on, "did the question come up?"

"Well, of his asking me what it is I gain."

She had a pause. "Then as I've asked you too it settles my case.

Oh you HAVE," she repeated, "treasures of imagination."

But he had been for an instant thinking away from this, and he came

up in another place. "And yet Mrs. Newsome--it's a thing to

remember--HAS imagined, did, that is, imagine, and apparently still

does, horrors about what I should have found. I was booked, by her

vision--extraordinarily intense, after all--to find them; and that

I didn't, that I couldn't, that, as she evidently felt, I wouldn't--

this evidently didn't at all, as they say, 'suit' her book.

It was more than she could bear. That was her disappointment."

"You mean you were to have found Chad himself horrible?"

"I was to have found the woman."

"Horrible?"

"Found her as she imagined her." And Strether paused as if for his

own expression of it he could add no touch to that picture.

His companion had meanwhile thought. "She imagined stupidly--so it

comes to the same thing."

"Stupidly? Oh!" said Strether.

But she insisted. "She imagined meanly."

He had it, however, better. "It couldn't but be ignorantly."

"Well, intensity with ignorance--what do you want worse?"

This question might have held him, but he let it pass. "Sarah

isn't ignorant--now; she keeps up the theory of the horrible."

"Ah but she's intense--and that by itself will do sometimes as

well. If it doesn't do, in this case, at any rate, to deny that

Marie's charming, it will do at least to deny that she's good."

"What I claim is that she's good for Chad."

"You don't claim"--she seemed to like it clear--"that she's good

for YOU."

But he continued without heeding. "That's what I wanted them to

come out for--to see for themselves if she's bad for him."

"And now that they've done so they won't admit that she's good even

for anything?"

"They do think," Strether presently admitted, "that she's on the

whole about as bad for me. But they're consistent of course,

inasmuch as they've their clear view of what's good for both of us."

"For you, to begin with"--Maria, all responsive, confined the

question for the moment--"to eliminate from your existence and if

possible even from your memory the dreadful creature that I must

gruesomely shadow forth for them, even more than to eliminate the

distincter evil--thereby a little less portentous--of the person

whose confederate you've suffered yourself to become. However,

that's comparatively simple. You can easily, at the worst, after

all, give me up."

"I can easily at the worst, after all, give you up." The irony was

so obvious that it needed no care. "I can easily at the worst,

after all, even forget you."

"Call that then workable. But Mr. Newsome has much more to forget.

How can HE do it?"

"Ah there again we are! That's just what I was to have made him do;

just where I was to have worked with him and helped."

She took it in silence and without attenuation--as if perhaps from

very familiarity with the facts; and her thought made a connexion

without showing the links. "Do you remember how we used to talk at

Chester and in London about my seeing you through?" She spoke as

of far-off things and as if they had spent weeks at the places

she named.

"It's just what you ARE doing."

"Ah but the worst--since you've left such a margin--may be still

to come. You may yet break down."

"Yes, I may yet break down. But will you take me--?"

He had hesitated, and she waited. "Take you?"

"For as long as I can bear it."

She also debated "Mr. Newsome and Madame de Vionnet may, as we were

saying, leave town. How long do you think you can bear it without them?"

Strether's reply to this was at first another question. "Do you mean

in order to get away from me?"

Her answer had an abruptness. "Don't find me rude if I say I should

think they'd want to!"

He looked at her hard again--seemed even for an instant to have an

intensity of thought under which his colour changed. But he

smiled. "You mean after what they've done to me?"

"After what SHE has."

At this, however, with a laugh, he was all right again. "Ah but

she hasn't done it yet!"

III

He had taken the train a few days after this from a station--

as well as to a station--selected almost at random; such days,

whatever should happen, were numbered, and he had gone forth under

the impulse--artless enough, no doubt--to give the whole of one of

them to that French ruralism, with its cool special green, into

which he had hitherto looked only through the little oblong window

of the picture-frame. It had been as yet for the most part but a

land of fancy for him--the background of fiction, the medium of

art, the nursery of letters; practically as distant as Greece, but

practically also well-nigh as consecrated. Romance could weave

itself, for Strether's sense, out of elements mild enough; and even

after what he had, as he felt, lately "been through," he could

thrill a little at the chance of seeing something somewhere that

would remind him of a certain small Lambinet that had charmed him,

long years before, at a Boston dealer's and that he had quite

absurdly never forgotten. It had been offered, he remembered, at a

price he had been instructed to believe the lowest ever named for a

Lambinet, a price he had never felt so poor as on having to recognise,

all the same, as beyond a dream of possibility. He had dreamed--

had turned and twisted possibilities for an hour: it had been

the only adventure of his life in connexion with the purchase

of a work of art. The adventure, it will be perceived, was modest;

but the memory, beyond all reason and by some accident of

association, was sweet. The little Lambinet abode with him as the

picture he WOULD have bought--the particular production that had

made him for the moment overstep the modesty of nature. He was

quite aware that if he were to see it again he should perhaps have

a drop or a shock, and he never found himself wishing that the

wheel of time would turn it up again, just as he had seen it in the

maroon-coloured, sky-lighted inner shrine of Tremont Street.

It would be a different thing, however, to see the remembered mixture

resolved back into its elements--to assist at the restoration to

nature of the whole far-away hour: the dusty day in Boston, the

background of the Fitchburg Depot, of the maroon-coloured sanctum,

the special-green vision, the ridiculous price, the poplars, the

willows, the rushes, the river, the sunny silvery sky, the shady

woody horizon.

He observed in respect to his train almost no condition save that

it should stop a few times after getting out of the banlieue;

he threw himself on the general amiability of the day for the hint of

where to alight. His theory of his excursion was that he could

alight anywhere--not nearer Paris than an hour's run--on catching a

suggestion of the particular note required. It made its sign, the

suggestion--weather, air, light, colour and his mood all favouring--

at the end of some eighty minutes; the train pulled up just at the

right spot, and he found himself getting out as securely as if to

keep an appointment. It will be felt of him that he could amuse

himself, at his age, with very small things if it be again noted

that his appointment was only with a superseded Boston fashion. He

hadn't gone far without the quick confidence that it would be

quite sufficiently kept. The oblong gilt frame disposed its

enclosing lines; the poplars and willows, the reeds and river--

a river of which he didn't know, and didn't want to know, the name--

fell into a composition, full of felicity, within them; the sky

was silver and turquoise and varnish; the village on the left was

white and the church on the right was grey; it was all there, in

short--it was what he wanted: it was Tremont Street, it was France,

it was Lambinet. Moreover he was freely walking about in it.

He did this last, for an hour, to his heart's content, making

for the shady woody horizon and boring so deep into his impression

and his idleness that he might fairly have got through them again

and reached the maroon-coloured wall. It was a wonder, no doubt,

that the taste of idleness for him shouldn't need more time to

sweeten; but it had in fact taken the few previous days; it had

been sweetening in truth ever since the retreat of the Pococks.

He walked and walked as if to show himself how little he had now to do;

he had nothing to do but turn off to some hillside where he might

stretch himself and hear the poplars rustle, and whence--in the

course of an afternoon so spent, an afternoon richly suffused too

with the sense of a book in his pocket--he should sufficiently

command the scene to be able to pick out just the right little

rustic inn for an experiment in respect to dinner. There was a

train back to Paris at 9.20, and he saw himself partaking, at the

close of the day, with the enhancements of a coarse white cloth and

a sanded door, of something fried and felicitous, washed down with

authentic wine; after which he might, as he liked, either stroll

back to his station in the gloaming or propose for the local

carriole and converse with his driver, a driver who naturally wouldn't

fail of a stiff clean blouse, of a knitted nightcap and of the genius

of response--who, in fine, would sit on the shafts, tell him what

the French people were thinking, and remind him, as indeed the whole

episode would incidentally do, of Maupassant. Strether heard his lips,

for the first time in French air, as this vision assumed consistency,

emit sounds of expressive intention without fear of his company.

He had been afraid of Chad and of Maria and of Madame de Vionnet;

he had been most of all afraid of Waymarsh, in whose presence,

so far as they had mixed together in the light of the town, he had

never without somehow paying for it aired either his vocabulary

or his accent. He usually paid for it by meeting immediately

afterwards Waymarsh's eye.

Such were the liberties with which his fancy played after he had

turned off to the hillside that did really and truly, as well as

most amiably, await him beneath the poplars, the hillside that made

him feel, for a murmurous couple of hours, how happy had been his

thought. He had the sense of success, of a finer harmony in

things; nothing but what had turned out as yet according to his plan.

It most of all came home to him, as he lay on his back on the grass,

that Sarah had really gone, that his tension was really relaxed;

the peace diffused in these ideas might be delusive, but it hung about

him none the less for the time. It fairly, for half an hour,

sent him to sleep; he pulled his straw hat over his eyes--

he had bought it the day before with a reminiscence of Waymarsh's--

and lost himself anew in Lambinet. It was as if he had found out

he was tired--tired not from his walk, but from that inward

exercise which had known, on the whole, for three months, so little

intermission. That was it--when once they were off he had dropped;

this moreover was what he had dropped to, and now he was touching

bottom. He was kept luxuriously quiet, soothed and amused by the

consciousness of what he had found at the end of his descent. It

was very much what he had told Maria Gostrey he should like to stay

on for, the hugely-distributed Paris of summer, alternately

dazzling and dusky, with a weight lifted for him off its columns

and cornices and with shade and air in the flutter of awnings as

wide as avenues. It was present to him without attenuation that,

reaching out, the day after making the remark, for some proof of

his freedom, he had gone that very afternoon to see Madame de Vionnet.

He had gone again the next day but one, and the effect of the two

visits, the after-sense of the couple of hours spent with her,

was almost that of fulness and frequency. The brave intention of

frequency, so great with him from the moment of his finding himself

unjustly suspected at Woollett, had remained rather theoretic,

and one of the things he could muse about under his poplars was

the source of the special shyness that had still made him careful.

He had surely got rid of it now, this special shyness; what had become

of it if it hadn't precisely, within the week, rubbed off?

It struck him now in fact as sufficiently plain that if he had

still been careful he had been so for a reason. He had really

feared, in his behaviour, a lapse from good faith; if there was a

danger of one's liking such a woman too much one's best safety was

in waiting at least till one had the right to do so. In the light

of the last few days the danger was fairly vivid; so that it was

proportionately fortunate that the right was likewise established.

It seemed to our friend that he had on each occasion profited to

the utmost by the latter: how could he have done so more, he at

all events asked himself, than in having immediately let her know

that, if it was all the same to her, he preferred not to talk about

anything tiresome? He had never in his life so sacrificed an

armful of high interests as in that remark; he had never so prepared

the way for the comparatively frivolous as in addressing it to

Madame de Vionnet's intelligence. It hadn't been till later that

he quite recalled how in conjuring away everything but the pleasant

he had conjured away almost all they had hitherto talked about;

it was not till later even that he remembered how, with their new tone,

they hadn't so much as mentioned the name of Chad himself.

One of the things that most lingered with him on his hillside was

this delightful facility, with such a woman, of arriving at a new tone;

he thought, as he lay on his back, of all the tones she might make

possible if one were to try her, and at any rate of the probability

that one could trust her to fit them to occasions. He had wanted her

to feel that, as he was disinterested now, so she herself should be,

and she had showed she felt it, and he had showed he was grateful,

and it had been for all the world as if he were calling for

the first time. They had had other, but irrelevant, meetings;

it was quite as if, had they sooner known how much they REALLY

had in common, there were quantities of comparatively dull matters

they might have skipped. Well, they were skipping them now,

even to graceful gratitude, even to handsome "Don't mention it!"--

and it was amazing what could still come up without reference to

what had been going on between them. It might have been, on analysis,

nothing more than Shakespeare and the musical glasses; but it had

served all the purpose of his appearing to have said to her:

"Don't like me, if it's a question of liking me, for anything obvious

and clumsy that I've, as they call it, 'done' for you: like me--

well, like me, hang it, for anything else you choose. So, by

the same propriety, don't be for me simply the person I've come to know

through my awkward connexion with Chad--was ever anything, by the way,

MORE awkward? Be for me, please, with all your admirable tact and trust,

just whatever I may show you it's a present pleasure to me to think you."

It had been a large indication to meet; but if she hadn't met it

what HAD she done, and how had their time together slipped along

so smoothly, mild but not slow, and melting, liquefying, into his

happy illusion of idleness? He could recognise on the other hand

that he had probably not been without reason, in his prior, his

restricted state, for keeping an eye on his liability to lapse

from good faith.

He really continued in the picture--that being for himself his

situation--all the rest of this rambling day; so that the charm was

still, was indeed more than ever upon him when, toward six o'clock

he found himself amicably engaged with a stout white-capped

deep-voiced woman at the door of the auberge of the biggest village,

a village that affected him as a thing of whiteness, blueness and

crookedness, set in coppery green, and that had the river flowing

behind or before it--one couldn't say which; at the bottom, in

particular, of the inn-garden. He had had other adventures before this;

had kept along the height, after shaking off slumber; had admired,

had almost coveted, another small old church, all steep roof and

dim slate-colour without and all whitewash and paper flowers within;

had lost his way and had found it again; had conversed with rustics

who struck him perhaps a little more as men of the world than he had

expected; had acquired at a bound a fearless facility in French;

had had, as the afternoon waned, a watery bock, all pale and Parisian,

in the cafe of the furthest village, which was not the biggest;

and had meanwhile not once overstepped the oblong gilt frame.

The frame had drawn itself out for him, as much as you please;

but that was just his luck. He had finally come down again to the

valley, to keep within touch of stations and trains, turning his face

to the quarter from which he had started; and thus it was that he had

at last pulled up before the hostess of the Cheval Blanc, who met him,

with a rough readiness that was like the clatter of sabots over stones,

on their common ground of a cotelette de veau a l'oseille and a

subsequent lift. He had walked many miles and didn't know he was tired;

but he still knew he was amused, and even that, though he had been

alone all day, he had never yet so struck himself as engaged with

others and in midstream of his drama. It might have passed for

finished his drama, with its catastrophe all but reached: it had,

however, none the less been vivid again for him as he thus gave it

its fuller chance. He had only had to be at last well out of it to

feel it, oddly enough, still going on.

For this had been all day at bottom the spell of the picture--that

it was essentially more than anything else a scene and a stage,

that the very air of the play was in the rustle of the willows and

the tone of the sky. The play and the characters had, without his

knowing it till now, peopled all his space for him, and it seemed

somehow quite happy that they should offer themselves, in the

conditions so supplied, with a kind of inevitability. It was as if

the conditions made them not only inevitable, but so much more

nearly natural and right as that they were at least easier,

pleasanter, to put up with. The conditions had nowhere so asserted

their difference from those of Woollett as they appeared to him to

assert it in the little court of the Cheval Blanc while he arranged

with his hostess for a comfortable climax. They were few and

simple, scant and humble, but they were THE THING, as he would have

called it, even to a greater degree than Madame de Vionnet's old

high salon where the ghost of the Empire walked. "The" thing was

the thing that implied the greatest number of other things of the

sort he had had to tackle; and it was queer of course, but so it

was--the implication here was complete. Not a single one of his

observations but somehow fell into a place in it; not a breath of

the cooler evening that wasn't somehow a syllable of the text.

The text was simply, when condensed, that in THESE places such

things were, and that if it was in them one elected to move about

one had to make one's account with what one lighted on. Meanwhile

at all events it was enough that they did affect one--so far as the

village aspect was concerned--as whiteness, crookedness and

blueness set in coppery green; there being positively, for that

matter, an outer wall of the White Horse that was painted the most

improbable shade. That was part of the amusement--as if to show

that the fun was harmless; just as it was enough, further, that the

picture and the play seemed supremely to melt together in the good

woman's broad sketch of what she could do for her visitor's

appetite. He felt in short a confidence, and it was general, and

it was all he wanted to feel. It suffered no shock even on her

mentioning that she had in fact just laid the cloth for two persons

who, unlike Monsieur, had arrived by the river--in a boat of their

own; who had asked her, half an hour before, what she could do for

them, and had then paddled away to look at something a little

further up--from which promenade they would presently return.

Monsieur might meanwhile, if he liked, pass into the garden, such

as it was, where she would serve him, should he wish it--for there

were tables and benches in plenty--a "bitter" before his repast.

Here she would also report to him on the possibility of a

conveyance to his station, and here at any rate he would have the

agrement of the river .

It may be mentioned without delay that Monsieur had the agrement of

everything, and in particular, for the next twenty minutes,

of a small and primitive pavilion that, at the garden's edge, almost

overhung the water, testifying, in its somewhat battered state, to

much fond frequentation. It consisted of little more than a

platform, slightly raised, with a couple of benches and a table, a

protecting rail and a projecting roof; but it raked the full

grey-blue stream, which, taking a turn a short distance above,

passed out of sight to reappear much higher up; and it was clearly

in esteemed requisition for Sundays and other feasts. Strether sat

there and, though hungry, felt at peace; the confidence that had so

gathered for him deepened with the lap of the water, the ripple of

the surface, the rustle of the reeds on the opposite bank, the

faint diffused coolness and the slight rock of a couple of small

boats attached to a rough landing-place hard by. The valley on the

further side was all copper-green level and glazed pearly sky, a

sky hatched across with screens of trimmed trees, which looked

flat, like espaliers; and though the rest of the village straggled

away in the near quarter the view had an emptiness that made one of

the boats suggestive. Such a river set one afloat almost before

one could take up the oars--the idle play of which would be

moreover the aid to the full impression. This perception went so

far as to bring him to his feet; but that movement, in turn, made

him feel afresh that he was tired, and while he leaned against a

post and continued to look out he saw something that gave him a

sharper arrest.

IV

What he saw was exactly the right thing--a boat advancing round the

bend and containing a man who held the paddles and a lady, at the

stern, with a pink parasol. It was suddenly as if these figures,

or something like them, had been wanted in the picture, had been

wanted more or less all day, and had now drifted into sight, with

the slow current, on purpose to fill up the measure. They came

slowly, floating down, evidently directed to the landing-place near

their spectator and presenting themselves to him not less clearly

as the two persons for whom his hostess was already preparing a

meal. For two very happy persons he found himself straightway

taking them--a young man in shirt-sleeves, a young woman easy and

fair, who had pulled pleasantly up from some other place and, being

acquainted with the neighbourhood, had known what this particular

retreat could offer them. The air quite thickened, at their

approach, with further intimations; the intimation that they were

expert, familiar, frequent--that this wouldn't at all events be

the first time. They knew how to do it, he vaguely felt--and it

made them but the more idyllic, though at the very moment

of the impression, as happened, their boat seemed to have begun to

drift wide, the oarsman letting it go. It had by this time none

the less come much nearer--near enough for Strether to dream the

lady in the stern had for some reason taken account of his being

there to watch them. She had remarked on it sharply, yet her

companion hadn't turned round; it was in fact almost as if our

friend had felt her bid him keep still. She had taken in something

as a result of which their course had wavered, and it continued to

waver while they just stood off. This little effect was sudden and

rapid, so rapid that Strether's sense of it was separate only for

an instant from a sharp start of his own. He too had within the

minute taken in something, taken in that he knew the lady whose

parasol, shifting as if to hide her face, made so fine a pink point

in the shining scene. It was too prodigious, a chance in a million,

but, if he knew the lady, the gentleman, who still presented his back

and kept off, the gentleman, the coatless hero of the idyll,

who had responded to her start, was, to match the marvel, none other

than Chad.

Chad and Madame de Vionnet were then like himself taking a day in

the country--though it was as queer as fiction, as farce, that

their country could happen to be exactly his; and she had been the

first at recognition, the first to feel, across the water, the shock--

for it appeared to come to that--of their wonderful accident.

Strether became aware, with this, of what was taking place--

that her recognition had been even stranger for the pair in the boat,

that her immediate impulse had been to control it, and that she was

quickly and intensely debating with Chad the risk of betrayal.

He saw they would show nothing if they could feel sure he hadn't

made them out; so that he had before him for a few seconds his

own hesitation. It was a sharp fantastic crisis that had popped up

as if in a dream, and it had had only to last the few seconds to

make him feel it as quite horrible. They were thus, on either side,

TRYING the other side, and all for some reason that broke the stillness

like some unprovoked harsh note. It seemed to him again, within the

limit, that he had but one thing to do--to settle their common question

by some sign of surprise and joy. He hereupon gave large play to

these things, agitating his hat and his stick and loudly calling out--

a demonstration that brought him relief as soon as he had seen it

answered. The boat, in mid-stream, still went a little wild--

which seemed natural, however, while Chad turned round, half

springing up; and his good friend, after blankness and wonder,

began gaily to wave her parasol. Chad dropped afresh to his paddles

and the boat headed round, amazement and pleasantry filling the air

meanwhile, and relief, as Strether continued to fancy, superseding

mere violence. Our friend went down to the water under this odd

impression as of violence averted--the violence of their having

"cut" him, out there in the eye of nature, on the assumption that

he wouldn't know it. He awaited them with a face from which he

was conscious of not being able quite to banish this idea that they

would have gone on, not seeing and not knowing, missing their dinner

and disappointing their hostess, had he himself taken a line to match.

That at least was what darkened his vision for the moment. Afterwards,

after they had bumped at the landing-place and he had assisted their

getting ashore, everything found itself sponged over by the mere

miracle of the encounter.

They could so much better at last, on either side, treat it as a

wild extravagance of hazard, that the situation was made elastic by

the amount of explanation called into play. Why indeed--apart from

oddity--the situation should have been really stiff was a question

naturally not practical at the moment, and in fact, so far as we

are concerned, a question tackled, later on and in private, only by

Strether himself. He was to reflect later on and in private that

it was mainly HE who had explained--as he had had moreover

comparatively little difficulty in doing. He was to have at all

events meanwhile the worrying thought of their perhaps secretly

suspecting him of having plotted this coincidence, taking such

pains as might be to give it the semblance of an accident. That

possibility--as their imputation--didn't of course bear looking

into for an instant; yet the whole incident was so manifestly,

arrange it as they would, an awkward one, that he could scarce keep

disclaimers in respect to his own presence from rising to his lips.

Disclaimers of intention would have been as tactless as his

presence was practically gross; and the narrowest escape they

either of them had was his lucky escape, in the event, from making

any. Nothing of the sort, so far as surface and sound were

involved, was even in question; surface and sound all made for

their common ridiculous good fortune, for the general

invraisemblance of the occasion, for the charming chance that they

had, the others, in passing, ordered some food to be ready, the

charming chance that he had himself not eaten, the charming chance,

even more, that their little plans, their hours, their train, in

short, from la-bas, would all match for their return together to

Paris. The chance that was most charming of all, the chance that

drew from Madame de Vionnet her clearest, gayest "Comme cela se

trouve!" was the announcement made to Strether after they were

seated at table, the word given him by their hostess in respect to

his carriage for the station, on which he might now count. It

settled the matter for his friends as well; the conveyance--

it WAS all too lucky!--would serve for them; and nothing was more

delightful than his being in a position to make the train so definite.

It might have been, for themselves--to hear Madame de Vionnet--

almost unnaturally vague, a detail left to be fixed; though Strether

indeed was afterwards to remember that Chad had promptly enough

intervened to forestall this appearance, laughing at his companion's

flightiness and making the point that he had after all, in spite of

the bedazzlement of a day out with her, known what he was about.

Strether was to remember afterwards further that this had had for

him the effect of forming Chad's almost sole intervention; and

indeed he was to remember further still, in subsequent meditation,

many things that, as it were, fitted together. Another of them was

for instance that the wonderful woman's overflow of surprise and

amusement was wholly into French, which she struck him as speaking

with an unprecedented command of idiomatic turns, but in which she

got, as he might have said, somewhat away from him, taking all at

once little brilliant jumps that he could but lamely match. The

question of his own French had never come up for them; it was the

one thing she wouldn't have permitted--it belonged, for a person

who had been through much, to mere boredom; but the present result

was odd, fairly veiling her identity, shifting her back into a mere

voluble class or race to the intense audibility of which he was by

this time inured. When she spoke the charming slightly strange

English he best knew her by he seemed to feel her as a creature,

among all the millions, with a language quite to herself, the real

monopoly of a special shade of speech, beautifully easy for her,

yet of a colour and a cadence that were both inimitable and matters

of accident. She came back to these things after they had shaken

down in the inn-parlour and knew, as it were, what was to become of

them; it was inevitable that loud ejaculation over the prodigy of

their convergence should at last wear itself out. Then it was that

his impression took fuller form--the impression, destined only to

deepen, to complete itself, that they had something to put a face

upon, to carry off and make the best of, and that it was she who,

admirably on the whole, was doing this. It was familiar to him of

course that they had something to put a face upon; their

friendship, their connexion, took any amount of explaining--that

would have been made familiar by his twenty minutes with Mrs. Pocock

if it hadn't already been so. Yet his theory, as we know, had

bountifully been that the facts were specifically none of his

business, and were, over and above, so far as one had to do with

them, intrinsically beautiful; and this might have prepared him for

anything, as well as rendered him proof against mystification.

When he reached home that night, however, he knew he had been, at

bottom, neither prepared nor proof; and since we have spoken of

what he was, after his return, to recall and interpret, it may as

well immediately be said that his real experience of these few

hours put on, in that belated vision--for he scarce went to bed

till morning--the aspect that is most to our purpose.

He then knew more or less how he had been affected--he but half

knew at the time. There had been plenty to affect him even after,

as has been said, they had shaken down; for his consciousness,

though muffled, had its sharpest moments during this passage, a

marked drop into innocent friendly Bohemia. They then had put

their elbows on the table, deploring the premature end of their two

or three dishes; which they had tried to make up with another

bottle while Chad joked a little spasmodically, perhaps even a

little irrelevantly, with the hostess. What it all came to had

been that fiction and fable WERE, inevitably, in the air, and not

as a simple term of comparison, but as a result of things said;

also that they were blinking it, all round, and that they yet needn't,

so much as that, have blinked it--though indeed if they hadn't

Strether didn't quite see what else they could have done.

Strether didn't quite see THAT even at an hour or two past midnight,

even when he had, at his hotel, for a long time, without a light

and without undressing, sat back on his bedroom sofa and stared

straight before him. He was, at that point of vantage, in full

possession, to make of it all what he could. He kept making of it

that there had been simply a LIE in the charming affair--a lie

on which one could now, detached and deliberate, perfectly put

one's finger. It was with the lie that they had eaten and drunk

and talked and laughed, that they had waited for their carriole

rather impatiently, and had then got into the vehicle and, sensibly

subsiding, driven their three or four miles through the darkening

summer night. The eating and drinking, which had been a resource,

had had the effect of having served its turn; the talk and laughter

had done as much; and it was during their somewhat tedious progress

to the station, during the waits there, the further delays, their

submission to fatigue, their silences in the dim compartment of the

much-stopping train, that he prepared himself for reflexions to come.

It had been a performance, Madame de Vionnet's manner, and though

it had to that degree faltered toward the end, as through her ceasing

to believe in it, as if she had asked herself, or Chad had found

a moment surreptitiously to ask her, what after all was the use,

a performance it had none the less quite handsomely remained,

with the final fact about it that it was on the whole easier to

keep up than to abandon.

From the point of view of presence of mind it had been very

wonderful indeed, wonderful for readiness, for beautiful assurance,

for the way her decision was taken on the spot, without time to

confer with Chad, without time for anything. Their only conference

could have been the brief instants in the boat before they confessed

to recognising the spectator on the bank, for they hadn't been alone

together a moment since and must have communicated all in silence.

It was a part of the deep impression for Strether, and not the least

of the deep interest, that they COULD so communicate--that Chad

in particular could let her know he left it to her. He habitually

left things to others, as Strether was so well aware, and it in fact

came over our friend in these meditations that there had been as yet

no such vivid illustration of his famous knowing how to live.

It was as if he had humoured her to the extent of letting her lie

without correction--almost as if, really, he would be coming round

in the morning to set the matter, as between Strether and himself,

right. Of course he couldn't quite come; it was a case in which

a man was obliged to accept the woman's version, even when fantastic;

if she had, with more flurry than she cared to show, elected,

as the phrase was, to represent that they had left Paris that morning,

and with no design but of getting back within the day--if she had

so sized-up, in the Woollett phrase, their necessity, she knew best

her own measure. There were things, all the same, it was impossible

to blink and which made this measure an odd one--the too evident fact

for instance that she hadn't started out for the day dressed and hatted

and shod, and even, for that matter, pink parasol'd, as she had been

in the boat. From what did the drop in her assurance proceed as the

tension increased--from what did this slightly baffled ingenuity spring

but from her consciousness of not presenting, as night closed in,

with not so much as a shawl to wrap her round, an appearance that

matched her story? She admitted that she was cold, but only to

blame her imprudence which Chad suffered her to give such account

of as she might. Her shawl and Chad's overcoat and her other

garments, and his, those they had each worn the day before, were at

the place, best known to themselves--a quiet retreat enough, no

doubt--at which they had been spending the twenty-four hours, to

which they had fully meant to return that evening, from which they

had so remarkably swum into Strether's ken, and the tacit

repudiation of which had been thus the essence of her comedy.

Strether saw how she had perceived in a flash that they couldn't

quite look to going back there under his nose; though, honestly,

as he gouged deeper into the matter, he was somewhat surprised, as

Chad likewise had perhaps been, at the uprising of this scruple.

He seemed even to divine that she had entertained it rather for

Chad than for herself, and that, as the young man had lacked the

chance to enlighten her, she had had to go on with it, he meanwhile

mistaking her motive.

He was rather glad, none the less, that they had in point of fact

not parted at the Cheval Blanc, that he hadn't been reduced to

giving them his blessing for an idyllic retreat down the river.

He had had in the actual case to make-believe more than he liked,

but this was nothing, it struck him, to what the other event

would have required. Could he, literally, quite have faced the

other event? Would he have been capable of making the best of it

with them? This was what he was trying to do now; but with the

advantage of his being able to give more time to it a good deal

counteracted by his sense of what, over and above the central fact

itself, he had to swallow. It was the quantity of make-believe

involved and so vividly exemplified that most disagreed with his

spiritual stomach. He moved, however, from the consideration of

that quantity--to say nothing of the consciousness of that organ--

back to the other feature of the show, the deep, deep truth of

the intimacy revealed. That was what, in his vain vigil, he oftenest

reverted to: intimacy, at such a point, was LIKE that--and what in

the world else would one have wished it to be like? It was all

very well for him to feel the pity of its being so much like lying;

he almost blushed, in the dark, for the way he had dressed the

possibility in vagueness, as a little girl might have dressed her doll.

He had made them--and by no fault of their own--momentarily pull it for

him, the possibility, out of this vagueness; and must he not therefore

take it now as they had had simply, with whatever thin attenuations,

to give it to him? The very question, it may be added, made him feel

lonely and cold. There was the element of the awkward all round, but

Chad and Madame de Vionnet had at least the comfort that they could talk

it over together. With whom could HE talk of such things?--unless

indeed always, at almost any stage, with Maria? He foresaw that

Miss Gostrey would come again into requisition on the morrow;

though it wasn't to be denied that he was already a little afraid

of her "What on earth--that's what I want to know now--had you

then supposed?" He recognised at last that he had really been trying

all along to suppose nothing. Verily, verily, his labour had been lost.

He found himself supposing innumerable and wonderful things.

Book Twelfth

I

Strether couldn't have said he had during the previous hours

definitely expected it; yet when. later on, that morning--though

no later indeed than for his coming forth at ten o'clock--he saw

the concierge produce, on his approach, a petit bleu delivered

since his letters had been sent up, he recognised the appearance as

the first symptom of a sequel. He then knew he had been thinking

of some early sign from Chad as more likely, after all, than not;

and this would be precisely the early sign. He took it so for

granted that he opened the petit bleu just where he had stopped, in

the pleasant cool draught of the porte-cochere--only curious to see

where the young man would, at such a juncture, break out. His

curiosity, however, was more than gratified; the small missive,

whose gummed edge he had detached without attention to the address,

not being from the young man at all, but from the person whom the

case gave him on the spot as still more worth while. Worth while

or not, he went round to the nearest telegraph-office, the big one

on the Boulevard, with a directness that almost confessed to a fear

of the danger of delay. He might have been thinking that if he didn't

go before he could think he wouldn't perhaps go at all. He at

any rate kept, in the lower side-pocket of his morning coat, a very

deliberate hand on his blue missive, crumpling it up rather tenderly

than harshly. He wrote a reply, on the Boulevard, also in the form

of a petit bleu--which was quickly done, under pressure of the place,

inasmuch as, like Madame de Vionnet's own communication, it consisted

of the fewest words. She had asked him if he could do her the very

great kindness of coming to see her that evening at half-past nine,

and he answered, as if nothing were easier, that he would present

himself at the hour she named. She had added a line of postscript,

to the effect that she would come to him elsewhere and at his own hour

if he preferred; but he took no notice of this, feeling that if he

saw her at all half the value of it would be in seeing her where he

had already seen her best. He mightn't see her at all; that was

one of the reflexions he made after writing and before he dropped

his closed card into the box; he mightn't see any one at all

any more at all; he might make an end as well now as ever,

leaving things as they were, since he was doubtless not to leave

them better, and taking his way home so far as should appear that

a home remained to him. This alternative was for a few minutes

so sharp that if he at last did deposit his missive it was perhaps

because the pressure of the place had an effect.

There was none other, however, than the common and constant pressure,

familiar to our friend under the rubric of Postes et Telegraphes--

the something in the air of these establishments; the vibration of

the vast strange life of the town, the influence of the types,

the performers concocting their messages; the little prompt Paris women,

arranging, pretexting goodness knew what, driving the dreadful

needle-pointed public pen at the dreadful sand-strewn public table:

implements that symbolised for Strether's too interpretative innocence

something more acute in manners, more sinister in morals, more fierce

in the national life. After he had put in his paper he had ranged

himself, he was really amused to think, on the side of the fierce,

the sinister, the acute. He was carrying on a correspondence,

across the great city, quite in the key of the Postes et Telegraphes

in general; and it was fairly as if the acceptance of that fact had

come from something in his state that sorted with the occupation of

his neighbours. He was mixed up with the typical tale of Paris, and so

were they, poor things--how could they all together help being?

They were no worse than he, in short, and he no worse than they--

if, queerly enough, no better; and at all events he had settled his

hash, so that he went out to begin, from that moment, his day of

waiting. The great settlement was, as he felt, in his preference

for seeing his correspondent in her own best conditions. THAT was

part of the typical tale, the part most significant in respect to

himself. He liked the place she lived in, the picture that each

time squared itself, large and high and clear, around her: every

occasion of seeing it was a pleasure of a different shade. Yet

what precisely was he doing with shades of pleasure now, and why

hadn't he properly and logically compelled her to commit herself

to whatever of disadvantage and penalty the situation might throw

up? He might have proposed, as for Sarah Pocock, the cold

hospitality of his own salon de lecture, in which the chill of

Sarah's visit seemed still to abide and shades of pleasure were

dim; he might have suggested a stone bench in the dusty Tuileries

or a penny chair at the back part of the Champs Elysees. These

things would have been a trifle stern, and sternness alone now

wouldn't be sinister. An instinct in him cast about for some form

of discipline in which they might meet--some awkwardness they would

suffer from, some danger, or at least some grave inconvenience,

they would incur. This would give a sense--which the spirit

required, rather ached and sighed in the absence of--that somebody

was paying something somewhere and somehow, that they were at least

not all floating together on the silver stream of impunity. Just

instead of that to go and see her late in the evening, as if, for

all the world--well, as if he were as much in the swim as anybody

else: this had as little as possible in common with the penal form.

Even when he had felt that objection melt away, however, the

practical difference was small; the long stretch of his interval

took the colour it would, and if he lived on thus with the sinister

from hour to hour it proved an easier thing than one might have

supposed in advance. He reverted in thought to his old tradition,

the one he had been brought up on and which even so many years of

life had but little worn away; the notion that the state of the

wrongdoer, or at least this person's happiness, presented some

special difficulty. What struck him now rather was the ease of it--

for nothing in truth appeared easier. It was an ease he himself

fairly tasted of for the rest of the day; giving himself quite up;

not so much as trying to dress it out, in any particular whatever,

as a difficulty; not after all going to see Maria--which would have

been in a manner a result of such dressing; only idling, lounging,

smoking, sitting in the shade, drinking lemonade and consuming

ices. The day had turned to heat and eventual thunder, and he now

and again went back to his hotel to find that Chad hadn't been

there. He hadn't yet struck himself, since leaving Woollett, so

much as a loafer, though there had been times when he believed

himself touching bottom. This was a deeper depth than any, and

with no foresight, scarcely with a care, as to what he should bring

up. He almost wondered if he didn't LOOK demoralised and

disreputable; he had the fanciful vision, as he sat and smoked,

of some accidental, some motived, return of the Pococks, who would

be passing along the Boulevard and would catch this view of him.

They would have distinctly, on his appearance, every ground for scandal.

But fate failed to administer even that sternness; the Pococks never

passed and Chad made no sign. Strether meanwhile continued to hold off

from Miss Gostrey, keeping her till to-morrow; so that by evening

his irresponsibility, his impunity, his luxury, had become--there was

no other word for them--immense.

Between nine and ten, at last, in the high clear picture--he was

moving in these days, as in a gallery, from clever canvas to clever

canvas--he drew a long breath: it was so presented to him from the

first that the spell of his luxury wouldn't be broken. He wouldn't

have, that is, to become responsible--this was admirably in the air:

she had sent for him precisely to let him feel it, so that he

might go on with the comfort (comfort already established, hadn't

it been?) of regarding his ordeal, the ordeal of the weeks of

Sarah's stay and of their climax, as safely traversed and left

behind him. Didn't she just wish to assure him that SHE now took

it all and so kept it; that he was absolutely not to worry any

more, was only to rest on his laurels and continue generously to

help her? The light in her beautiful formal room was dim, though

it would do, as everything would always do; the hot night had kept

out lamps, but there was a pair of clusters of candles that

glimmered over the chimney-piece like the tall tapers of an altar.

The windows were all open, their redundant hangings swaying a

little, and he heard once more, from the empty court, the small

plash of the fountain. From beyond this, and as from a great

distance--beyond the court, beyond the corps de logis forming the

front--came, as if excited and exciting, the vague voice of Paris.

Strether had all along been subject to sudden gusts of fancy in

connexion with such matters as these--odd starts of the historic

sense, suppositions and divinations with no warrant but their

intensity. Thus and so, on the eve of the great recorded dates,

the days and nights of revolution, the sounds had come in, the

omens, the beginnings broken out. They were the smell of

revolution, the smell of the public temper--or perhaps simply the

smell of blood.

It was at present queer beyond words, "subtle," he would have

risked saying, that such suggestions should keep crossing the

scene; but it was doubtless the effect of the thunder in the air,

which had hung about all day without release. His hostess was

dressed as for thunderous times, and it fell in with the kind of

imagination we have just attributed to him that she should be in

simplest coolest white, of a character so old-fashioned, if he were

not mistaken, that Madame Roland must on the scaffold have worn

something like it. This effect was enhanced by a small black fichu

or scarf, of crape or gauze, disposed quaintly round her bosom and

now completing as by a mystic touch the pathetic, the noble analogy.

Poor Strether in fact scarce knew what analogy was evoked for him

as the charming woman, receiving him and making him, as she could do

such things, at once familiarly and gravely welcome, moved over her

great room with her image almost repeated in its polished floor,

which had been fully bared for summer. The associations of the place,

all felt again; the gleam here and there, in the subdued light,

of glass and gilt and parquet, with the quietness of her own note

as the centre--these things were at first as delicate as if they

had been ghostly, and he was sure in a moment that, whatever he should

find he had come for, it wouldn't be for an impression that had

previously failed him. That conviction held him from the outset,

and, seeming singularly to simplify, certified to him that the objects

about would help him, would really help them both. No, he might

never see them again--this was only too probably the last time;

and he should certainly see nothing in the least degree like them.

He should soon be going to where such things were not, and it would be

a small mercy for memory, for fancy, to have, in that stress,

a loaf on the shelf. He knew in advance he should look back on the

perception actually sharpest with him as on the view of something

old, old, old, the oldest thing he had ever personally touched;

and he also knew, even while he took his companion in as the feature

among features, that memory and fancy couldn't help being enlisted

for her. She might intend what she would, but this was beyond anything

she could intend, with things from far back--tyrannies of history,

facts of type, values, as the painters said, of expression--

all working for her and giving her the supreme chance, the chance

of the happy, the really luxurious few, the chance, on a great

occasion, to be natural and simple. She had never, with him,

been more so; or if it was the perfection of art it would never--

and that came to the same thing--be proved against her.

What was truly wonderful was her way of differing so from time to

time without detriment to her simplicity. Caprices, he was sure

she felt, were before anything else bad manners, and that judgement

in her was by itself a thing making more for safety of intercourse

than anything that in his various own past intercourses he had had

to reckon on. If therefore her presence was now quite other than

the one she had shown him the night before, there was nothing of

violence in the change--it was all harmony and reason. It gave him

a mild deep person, whereas he had had on the occasion to which

their interview was a direct reference a person committed to

movement and surface and abounding in them; but she was in either

character more remarkable for nothing than for her bridging of

intervals, and this now fell in with what he understood he was to

leave to her. The only thing was that, if he was to leave it ALL

to her, why exactly had she sent for him? He had had, vaguely, in

advance, his explanation, his view of the probability of her

wishing to set something right, to deal in some way with the fraud

so lately practised on his presumed credulity. Would she attempt

to carry it further or would she blot it out? Would she throw over

it some more or less happy colour; or would she do nothing about it

at all? He perceived soon enough at least that, however reasonable

she might be, she wasn't vulgarly confused, and it herewith

pressed upon him that their eminent "lie," Chad's and hers, was

simply after all such an inevitable tribute to good taste as he

couldn't have wished them not to render. Away from them, during

his vigil, he had seemed to wince at the amount of comedy involved;

whereas in his present posture he could only ask himself how he

should enjoy any attempt from her to take the comedy back. He

shouldn't enjoy it at all; but, once more and yet once more, he

could trust her. That is he could trust her to make deception

right. As she presented things the ugliness--goodness knew why--

went out of them; none the less too that she could present them,

with an art of her own, by not so much as touching them. She let

the matter, at all events, lie where it was--where the previous

twenty-four hours had placed it; appearing merely to circle about

it respectfully, tenderly, almost piously, while she took up

another question.

She knew she hadn't really thrown dust in his eyes; this, the

previous night, before they separated, had practically passed

between them; and, as she had sent for him to see what the

difference thus made for him might amount to, so he was conscious

at the end of five minutes that he had been tried and tested. She

had settled with Chad after he left them that she would, for her

satisfaction, assure herself of this quantity, and Chad had, as

usual, let her have her way. Chad was always letting people have

their way when he felt that it would somehow turn his wheel for

him; it somehow always did turn his wheel. Strether felt, oddly

enough, before these facts, freshly and consentingly passive; they

again so rubbed it into him that the couple thus fixing his

attention were intimate, that his intervention had absolutely aided

and intensified their intimacy, and that in fine he must accept the

consequence of that. He had absolutely become, himself, with his

perceptions and his mistakes, his concessions and his reserves, the

droll mixture, as it must seem to them, of his braveries and his

fears, the general spectacle of his art and his innocence, almost

an added link and certainly a common priceless ground for them to

meet upon. It was as if he had been hearing their very tone when

she brought out a reference that was comparatively straight.

"The last twice that you've been here, you know, I never asked you,"

she said with an abrupt transition--they had been pretending before

this to talk simply of the charm of yesterday and of the interest

of the country they had seen. The effort was confessedly vain; not

for such talk had she invited him; and her impatient reminder was

of their having done for it all the needful on his coming to her

after Sarah's flight. What she hadn't asked him then was to state

to her where and how he stood for her; she had been resting on

Chad's report of their midnight hour together in the Boulevard

Malesherbes. The thing therefore she at present desired was

ushered in by this recall of the two occasions on which,

disinterested and merciful, she hadn't worried him. To-night

truly she WOULD worry him, and this was her appeal to him to let

her risk it. He wasn't to mind if she bored him a little:

she had behaved, after all--hadn't she?--so awfully, awfully well.

II

"Oh, you're all right, you're all right," he almost impatiently

declared; his impatience being moreover not for her pressure, but

for her scruple. More and more distinct to him was the tune to

which she would have had the matter out with Chad: more and more

vivid for him the idea that she had been nervous as to what he

might be able to "stand." Yes, it had been a question if he had

"stood" what the scene on the river had given him, and, though the

young man had doubtless opined in favour of his recuperation, her

own last word must have been that she should feel easier in seeing

for herself. That was it, unmistakeably; she WAS seeing for

herself. What he could stand was thus, in these moments, in the

balance for Strether, who reflected, as he became fully aware of

it, that he must properly brace himself. He wanted fully to appear

to stand all he might; and there was a certain command of the

situation for him in this very wish not to look too much at sea.

She was ready with everything, but so, sufficiently, was he; that

is he was at one point the more prepared of the two, inasmuch as,

for all her cleverness, she couldn't produce on the spot--and it

was surprising--an account of the motive of her note. He had the

advantage that his pronouncing her "all right" gave him for an

enquiry. "May I ask, delighted as I've been to come, if you've

wished to say something special?" He spoke as if she might have

seen he had been waiting for it--not indeed with discomfort, but

with natural interest. Then he saw that she was a little taken

aback, was even surprised herself at the detail she had neglected--

the only one ever yet; having somehow assumed he would know, would

recognise, would leave some things not to be said. She looked at

him, however, an instant as if to convey that if he wanted them

ALL--!

"Selfish and vulgar--that's what I must seem to you. You've done

everything for me, and here I am as if I were asking for more. But

it isn't," she went on, "because I'm afraid--though I AM of course

afraid, as a woman in my position always is. I mean it isn't

because one lives in terror--it isn't because of that one is

selfish, for I'm ready to give you my word to-night that I don't

care; don't care what still may happen and what I may lose. I don't

ask you to raise your little finger for me again, nor do I wish

so much as to mention to you what we've talked of before, either

my danger or my safety, or his mother, or his sister, or the girl

he may marry, or the fortune he may make or miss, or the right

or the wrong, of any kind, he may do. If after the help one has

had from you one can't either take care of one's self or simply

hold one's tongue, one must renounce all claim to be an object of

interest. It's in the name of what I DO care about that I've tried

still to keep hold of you. How can I be indifferent," she asked,

"to how I appear to you?" And as he found himself unable

immediately to say: "Why, if you're going, NEED you, after all?

Is it impossible you should stay on--so that one mayn't lose you?"

"Impossible I should live with you here instead of going home?"

"Not 'with' us, if you object to that, but near enough to us,

somewhere, for us to see you--well," she beautifully brought out,

"when we feel we MUST. How shall we not sometimes feel it? I've

wanted to see you often when I couldn't," she pursued, "all these

last weeks. How shan't I then miss you now, with the sense of your

being gone forever?" Then as if the straightness of this appeal,

taking him unprepared, had visibly left him wondering: "Where IS

your 'home' moreover now--what has become of it? I've made a

change in your life, I know I have; I've upset everything in your

mind as well; in your sense of--what shall I call it?--all the

decencies and possibilities. It gives me a kind of detestation--"

She pulled up short.

Oh but he wanted to hear. "Detestation of what?"

"Of everything--of life."

"Ah that's too much," he laughed--"or too little!"

"Too little, precisely"--she was eager. "What I hate is myself--

when I think that one has to take so much, to be happy, out of the

lives of others, and that one isn't happy even then. One does it

to cheat one's self and to stop one's mouth--but that's only at the

best for a little. The wretched self is always there, always

making one somehow a fresh anxiety. What it comes to is that it's

not, that it's never, a happiness, any happiness at all, to TAKE.

The only safe thing is to give. It's what plays you least false."

Interesting, touching, strikingly sincere as she let these things

come from her, she yet puzzled and troubled him--so fine was the

quaver of her quietness. He felt what he had felt before with her,

that there was always more behind what she showed, and more and

more again behind that. "You know so, at least," she added, "where

you are!"

"YOU ought to know it indeed then; for isn't what you've been

giving exactly what has brought us together this way? You've been

making, as I've so fully let you know I've felt," Strether said,

"the most precious present I've ever seen made, and if you can't

sit down peacefully on that performance you ARE, no doubt, born to

torment yourself. But you ought," he wound up, "to be easy."

"And not trouble you any more, no doubt--not thrust on you even the

wonder and the beauty of what I've done; only let you regard our

business as over, and well over, and see you depart in a peace that

matches my own? No doubt, no doubt, no doubt," she nervously

repeated--"all the more that I don't really pretend I believe you

couldn't, for yourself, NOT have done what you have. I don't

pretend you feel yourself victimised, for this evidently is the way

you live, and it's what--we're agreed--is the best way. Yes, as

you say," she continued after a moment, "I ought to be easy and

rest on my work. Well then here am I doing so. I AM easy. You'll

have it for your last impression. When is it you say you go?" she

asked with a quick change.

He took some time to reply--his last impression was more and more

so mixed a one. It produced in him a vague disappointment, a drop

that was deeper even than the fall of his elation the previous

night. The good of what he had done, if he had done so much, wasn't

there to enliven him quite to the point that would have been ideal

for a grand gay finale. Women were thus endlessly absorbent, and

to deal with them was to walk on water. What was at bottom the matter

with her, embroider as she might and disclaim as she might--

what was at bottom the matter with her was simply Chad himself.

It was of Chad she was after all renewedly afraid; the strange

strength of her passion was the very strength of her fear; she clung

to HIM, Lambert Strether, as to a source of safety she had tested,

and, generous graceful truthful as she might try to be, exquisite

as she was, she dreaded the term of his being within reach.

With this sharpest perception yet, it was like a chill in the air

to him, it was almost appalling, that a creature so fine could be,

by mysterious forces, a creature so exploited. For at the end

of all things they WERE mysterious: she had but made Chad what

he was--so why could she think she had made him infinite?

She had made him better, she had made him best, she had made him

anything one would; but it came to our friend with supreme

queerness that he was none the less only Chad. Strether had the

sense that HE, a little, had made him too; his high appreciation

had as it were, consecrated her work The work, however admirable,

was nevertheless of the strict human order, and in short it was

marvellous that the companion of mere earthly joys, of comforts,

aberrations (however one classed them) within the common experience

should be so transcendently prized. It might have made Strether

hot or shy, as such secrets of others brought home sometimes do

make us; but he was held there by something so hard that it was

fairly grim. This was not the discomposure of last night; that had

quite passed--such discomposures were a detail; the real coercion

was to see a man ineffably adored. There it was again--it took

women, it took women; if to deal with them was to walk on water

what wonder that the water rose? And it had never surely risen

higher than round this woman. He presently found himself taking a

long look from her, and the next thing he knew he had uttered all

his thought. "You're afraid for your life!"

It drew out her long look, and he soon enough saw why. A spasm

came into her face, the tears she had already been unable to hide

overflowed at first in silence, and then, as the sound suddenly

comes from a child, quickened to gasps, to sobs. She sat and

covered her face with her hands, giving up all attempt at a manner.

"It's how you see me, it's how you see me"--she caught her breath

with it--"and it's as I AM, and as I must take myself, and of

course it's no matter." Her emotion was at first so incoherent that

he could only stand there at a loss, stand with his sense of having

upset her, though of having done it by the truth. He had to listen

to her in a silence that he made no immediate effort to attenuate,

feeling her doubly woeful amid all her dim diffused elegance;

consenting to it as he had consented to the rest, and even

conscious of some vague inward irony in the presence of such a fine

free range of bliss and bale. He couldn't say it was NOT no

matter; for he was serving her to the end, he now knew, anyway--

quite as if what he thought of her had nothing to do with it.

It was actually moreover as if he didn't think of her at all,

as if he could think of nothing but the passion, mature, abysmal,

pitiful, she represented, and the possibilities she betrayed.

She was older for him to-night, visibly less exempt from the

touch of time; but she was as much as ever the finest and

subtlest creature, the happiest apparition, it had been given him,

in all his years, to meet; and yet he could see her there as

vulgarly troubled, in very truth, as a maidservant crying for

her young man. The only thing was that she judged herself as

the maidservant wouldn't; the weakness of which wisdom too,

the dishonour of which judgement, seemed but to sink her lower.

Her collapse, however, no doubt, was briefer and she had in a

manner recovered herself before he intervened. "Of course

I'm afraid for my life. But that's nothing. It isn't that."

He was silent a little longer, as if thinking what it might be.

"There's something I have in mind that I can still do."

But she threw off at last, with a sharp sad headshake, drying her

eyes, what he could still do. "I don't care for that. Of course,

as I've said, you're acting, in your wonderful way, for yourself;

and what's for yourself is no more my business--though I may reach

out unholy hands so clumsily to touch it--than if it were something

in Timbuctoo. It's only that you don't snub me, as you've had

fifty chances to do--it's only your beautiful patience that makes

one forget one's manners. In spite of your patience, all the

same," she went on, "you'd do anything rather than be with us here,

even if that were possible. You'd do everything for us but be

mixed up with us--which is a statement you can easily answer to the

advantage of your own manners. You can say 'What's the use of

talking of things that at the best are impossible?' What IS of

course the use? It's only my little madness. You'd talk if you

were tormented. And I don't mean now about HIM. Oh for him--!"

Positively, strangely, bitterly, as it seemed to Strether, she gave

"him," for the moment, away. "You don't care what I think of you;

but I happen to care what you think of me. And what you MIGHT,"

she added. "What you perhaps even did."

He gained time. "What I did--?"

"Did think before. Before this. DIDn't you think--?"

But he had already stopped her. "I didn't think anything. I

never think a step further than I'm obliged to."

"That's perfectly false, I believe," she returned--"except that you

may, no doubt, often pull up when things become TOO ugly; or even,

I'll say, to save you a protest, too beautiful. At any rate, even

so far as it's true, we've thrust on you appearances that you've

had to take in and that have therefore made your obligation. Ugly

or beautiful--it doesn't matter what we call them--you were

getting on without them, and that's where we're detestable. We

bore you--that's where we are. And we may well--for what we've

cost you. All you can do NOW is not to think at all. And I who

should have liked to seem to you--well, sublime!"

He could only after a moment re-echo Miss Barrace. "You're

wonderful!"

"I'm old and abject and hideous"--she went on as without hearing

him. "Abject above all. Or old above all. It's when one's old

that it's worst. I don't care what becomes of it--let what WILL;

there it is. It's a doom--I know it; you can't see it more than I

do myself. Things have to happen as they will." With which she

came back again to what, face to face with him, had so quite broken

down. "Of course you wouldn't, even if possible, and no matter

what may happen to you, be near us. But think of me, think of me--!"

She exhaled it into air.

He took refuge in repeating something he had already said and that

she had made nothing of. "There's something I believe I can still

do." And he put his hand out for good-bye.

She again made nothing of it; she went on with her insistence.

"That won't help you. There's nothing to help you."

"Well, it may help YOU," he said.

She shook her head. "There's not a grain of certainty in my

future--for the only certainty is that I shall be the loser in the

end."

She hadn't taken his hand, but she moved with him to the door.

"That's cheerful," he laughed, "for your benefactor!"

"What's cheerful for ME," she replied, "is that we might, you and

I, have been friends. That's it--that's it. You see how, as I

say, I want everything. I've wanted you too."

"Ah but you've HAD me!" he declared, at the door, with an emphasis

that made an end.

III

His purpose had been to see Chad the next day, and he had prefigured

seeing him by an early call; having in general never stood on ceremony

in respect to visits at the Boulevard Malesherbes. It had been

more often natural for him to go there than for Chad to come to the

small hotel, the attractions of which were scant; yet it nevertheless,

just now, at the eleventh hour, did suggest itself to Strether to begin

by giving the young man a chance. It struck him that, in the

inevitable course, Chad would be "round," as Waymarsh used to say--

Waymarsh who already, somehow, seemed long ago. He hadn't come the

day before, because it had been arranged between them that Madame de Vionnet

should see their friend first; but now that this passage had taken place

he would present himself, and their friend wouldn't have long to wait.

Strether assumed, he became aware, on this reasoning, that the

interesting parties to the arrangement would have met betimes, and

that the more interesting of the two--as she was after all--would

have communicated to the other the issue of her appeal. Chad would

know without delay that his mother's messenger had been with her,

and, though it was perhaps not quite easy to see how she could

qualify what had occurred, he would at least have been sufficiently

advised to feel he could go on. The day, however, brought, early

or late, no word from him, and Strether felt, as a result of this,

that a change had practically come over their intercourse. It was

perhaps a premature judgement; or it only meant perhaps--how could

he tell?--that the wonderful pair he protected had taken up again

together the excursion he had accidentally checked. They might

have gone back to the country, and gone back but with a long breath drawn;

that indeed would best mark Chad's sense that reprobation hadn't

rewarded Madame de Vionnet's request for an interview. At the end of

the twenty-four hours, at the end of the forty-eight, there was still

no overture; so that Strether filled up the time, as he had so often

filled it before, by going to see Miss Gostrey.

He proposed amusements to her; he felt expert now in proposing

amusements; and he had thus, for several days, an odd sense of

leading her about Paris, of driving her in the Bois, of showing her

the penny steamboats--those from which the breeze of the Seine was

to be best enjoyed--that might have belonged to a kindly uncle

doing the honours of the capital to an Intelligent niece from the

country. He found means even to take her to shops she didn't

know, or that she pretended she didn't; while she, on her side,

was, like the country maiden, all passive modest and grateful--

going in fact so far as to emulate rusticity in occasional fatigues

and bewilderments. Strether described these vague proceedings to

himself, described them even to her, as a happy interlude; the sign

of which was that the companions said for the time no further word

about the matter they had talked of to satiety. He proclaimed

satiety at the outset, and she quickly took the hint; as docile

both in this and in everything else as the intelligent obedient

niece. He told her as yet nothing of his late adventure--for as

an adventure it now ranked with him; he pushed the whole business

temporarily aside and found his interest in the fact of her

beautiful assent. She left questions unasked--she who for so long

had been all questions; she gave herself up to him with an

understanding of which mere mute gentleness might have seemed the

sufficient expression. She knew his sense of his situation had

taken still another step--of that he was quite aware; but she

conveyed that, whatever had thus happened for him, it was thrown

into the shade by what was happening for herself. This--though it

mightn't to a detached spirit have seemed much--was the major

interest, and she met it with a new directness of response,

measuring it from hour to hour with her grave hush of acceptance.

Touched as he had so often been by her before, he was, for his part

too, touched afresh; all the more that though he could be duly

aware of the principle of his own mood he couldn't be equally so

of the principle of hers. He knew, that is, in a manner--knew

roughly and resignedly--what he himself was hatching; whereas he

had to take the chance of what he called to himself Maria's

calculations. It was all he needed that she liked him enough for

what they were doing, and even should they do a good deal more

would still like him enough for that; the essential freshness of a

relation so simple was a cool bath to the soreness produced by

other relations. These others appeared to him now horribly

complex; they bristled with fine points, points all unimaginable

beforehand, points that pricked and drew blood; a fact that gave to

an hour with his present friend on a bateau-mouche, or in the

afternoon shade of the Champs Elysees, something of the innocent

pleasure of handling rounded ivory. His relation with Chad

personally--from the moment he had got his point of view--had been

of the simplest; yet this also struck him as bristling, after a

third and a fourth blank day had passed. It was as if at last

however his care for such indications had dropped; there came a

fifth blank day and he ceased to enquire or to heed.

They now took on to his fancy, Miss Gostrey and he, the image of

the Babes in the Wood; they could trust the merciful elements to

let them continue at peace. He had been great already, as he knew,

at postponements; but he had only to get afresh into the rhythm of

one to feel its fine attraction. It amused him to say to himself

that he might for all the world have been going to die--die resignedly;

the scene was filled for him with so deep a death-bed hush, so

melancholy a charm. That meant the postponement of everything else--

which made so for the quiet lapse of life; and the postponement

in especial of the reckoning to come--unless indeed the reckoning

to come were to be one and the same thing with extinction. It faced

him, the reckoning, over the shoulder of much interposing experience--

which also faced him; and one would float to it doubtless duly

through these caverns of Kubla Khan. It was really behind everything;

it hadn't merged in what he had done; his final appreciation of what

he had done--his appreciation on the spot--would provide it with

its main sharpness. The spot so focussed was of course Woollett,

and he was to see, at the best, what Woollett would be with everything

there changed for him. Wouldn't THAT revelation practically amount to

the wind-up of his career? Well, the summer's end would show;

his suspense had meanwhile exactly the sweetness of vain delay;

and he had with it, we should mention, other pastimes than Maria's

company--plenty of separate musings in which his luxury failed him

but at one point. He was well in port, the outer sea behind him,

and it was only a matter of getting ashore. There was a question

that came and went for him, however, as he rested against the

side of his ship, and it was a little to get rid of the obsession

that he prolonged his hours with Miss Gostrey. It was a question

about himself, but it could only be settled by seeing Chad again;

it was indeed his principal reason for wanting to see Chad.

After that it wouldn't signify--it was a ghost that certain words

would easily lay to rest. Only the young man must be there to

take the words. Once they were taken he wouldn't have a question left;

none, that is, in connexion with this particular affair. It wouldn't

then matter even to himself that he might now have been guilty of

speaking BECAUSE of what he had forfeited. That was the refinement

of his supreme scruple--he wished so to leave what he had forfeited

out of account. He wished not to do anything because he had missed

something else, because he was sore or sorry or impoverished,

because he was maltreated or desperate; he wished to do everything

because he was lucid and quiet, just the same for himself on all

essential points as he had ever been. Thus it was that while he

virtually hung about for Chad he kept mutely putting it: "You've

been chucked, old boy; but what has that to do with it?" It would

have sickened him to feel vindictive.

These tints of feeling indeed were doubtless but the iridescence of

his idleness, and they were presently lost in a new light from

Maria. She had a fresh fact for him before the week was out, and

she practically met him with it on his appearing one night. He hadn't

on this day seen her, but had planned presenting himself in due course

to ask her to dine with him somewhere out of doors, on one of the

terraces, in one of the gardens, of which the Paris of summer was

profuse. It had then come on to rain, so that, disconcerted, he changed

his mind; dining alone at home, a little stuffily and stupidly, and

waiting on her afterwards to make up his loss. He was sure within a

minute that something had happened; it was so in the air of the rich

little room that he had scarcely to name his thought. Softly lighted,

the whole colour of the place, with its vague values, was in cool

fusion--an effect that made the visitor stand for a little agaze. It

was as if in doing so now he had felt a recent presence--his recognition

of the passage of which his hostess in turn divined. She had scarcely

to say it--"Yes, she has been here, and this time I received her." It

wasn't till a minute later that she added: "There being, as I

understand you, no reason NOW--!"

"None for your refusing?"

"No--if you've done what you've had to do."

"I've certainly so far done it," Strether said, "as that you needn't

fear the effect, or the appearance of coming between us. There's

nothing between us now but what we ourselves have put there, and

not an inch of room for anything else whatever. Therefore you're

only beautifully WITH us as always--though doubtless now, if she

has talked to you, rather more with us than less. Of course if

she came," he added, "it was to talk to you."

"It was to talk to me," Maria returned; on which he was further

sure that she was practically in possession of what he himself hadn't

yet told her. He was even sure she was in possession of things

he himself couldn't have told; for the consciousness of them was

now all in her face and accompanied there with a shade of sadness

that marked in her the close of all uncertainties. It came out for

him more than ever yet that she had had from the first a knowledge

she believed him not to have had, a knowledge the sharp acquisition

of which might be destined to make a difference for him. The

difference for him might not inconceivably be an arrest of his

independence and a change in his attitude--in other words a

revulsion in favour of the principles of Woollett. She had really

prefigured the possibility of a shock that would send him swinging

back to Mrs. Newsome. He hadn't, it was true, week after week,

shown signs of receiving it, but the possibility had been none the

less in the air. What Maria accordingly had had now to take in was

that the shock had descended and that he hadn't, all the same,

swung back. He had grown clear, in a flash, on a point long since

settled for herself; but no reapproximation to Mrs. Newsome had

occurred in consequence. Madame de Vionnet had by her visit held

up the torch to these truths, and what now lingered in poor Maria's

face was the somewhat smoky light of the scene between them.

If the light however wasn't, as we have hinted, the glow of joy,

the reasons for this also were perhaps discernible to Strether even

through the blur cast over them by his natural modesty. She had

held herself for months with a firm hand; she hadn't interfered on

any chance--and chances were specious enough--that she might

interfere to her profit. She had turned her back on the dream that

Mrs. Newsome's rupture, their friend's forfeiture--the engagement

the relation itself, broken beyond all mending--might furnish forth

her advantage; and, to stay her hand from promoting these things,

she had on private, difficult, but rigid, lines, played strictly

fair. She couldn't therefore but feel that, though, as the end of

all, the facts in question had been stoutly confirmed, her ground

for personal, for what might have been called interested, elation

remained rather vague. Strether might easily have made out that

she had been asking herself, in the hours she had just sat through,

if there were still for her, or were only not, a fair shade of

uncertainty. Let us hasten to add, however, that what he at first

made out on this occasion he also at first kept to himself. He

only asked what in particular Madame de Vionnet had come for,

and as to this his companion was ready.

"She wants tidings of Mr. Newsome, whom she appears not to have

seen for some days."

"Then she hasn't been away with him again?"

"She seemed to think," Maria answered, "that he might have gone

away with YOU."

"And did you tell her I know nothing of him?"

She had her indulgent headshake. "I've known nothing of what you

know. I could only tell her I'd ask you."

"Then I've not seen him for a week--and of course I've wondered."

His wonderment showed at this moment as sharper, but he presently

went on. "Still, I dare say I can put my hand on him. Did she

strike you," he asked, "as anxious?"

"She's always anxious."

"After all I've done for her?" And he had one of the last flickers

of his occasional mild mirth. "To think that was just what I came

out to prevent!"

She took it up but to reply. "You don't regard him then as safe?"

"I was just going to ask you how in that respect you regard Madame

de Vionnet."

She looked at him a little. "What woman was EVER safe? She told

me," she added--and it was as if at the touch of the connexion--

"of your extraordinary meeting in the country. After that a quoi

se fier?"

"It was, as an accident, in all the possible or impossible chapter,"

Strether conceded, "amazing enough. But still, but still--!"

"But still she didn't mind?"

"She doesn't mind anything."

"Well, then, as you don't either, we may all sink to rest!"

He appeared to agree with her, but he had his reservation.

"I do mind Chad's disappearance."

"Oh you'll get him back. But now you know," she said, "why I went

to Mentone." He had sufficiently let her see that he had by this

time gathered things together, but there was nature in her wish to

make them clearer still. "I didn't want you to put it to me."

"To put it to you--?"

"The question of what you were at last--a week ago--to see for

yourself. I didn't want to have to lie for her. I felt that to

be too much for me. A man of course is always expected to do it--

to do it, I mean, for a woman; but not a woman for another woman;

unless perhaps on the tit-for-tat principle, as an indirect way of

protecting herself. I don't need protection, so that I was free to

'funk' you--simply to dodge your test. The responsibility was too

much for me. I gained time, and when I came back the need of a

test had blown over."

Strether thought of it serenely. "Yes; when you came back little

Bilham had shown me what's expected of a gentleman. Little Bilham

had lied like one."

"And like what you believed him?"

"Well," said Strether, "it was but a technical lie--he classed the

attachment as virtuous. That was a view for which there was much

to be said--and the virtue came out for me hugely There was of

course a great deal of it. I got it full in the face, and I haven't,

you see, done with it yet."

"What I see, what I saw," Maria returned, "is that you dressed up

even the virtue. You were wonderful--you were beautiful, as I've

had the honour of telling you before; but, if you wish really to

know," she sadly confessed, "I never quite knew WHERE you were.

There were moments," she explained, "when you struck me as grandly

cynical; there were others when you struck me as grandly vague."

Her friend considered. "I had phases. I had flights."

"Yes, but things must have a basis."

"A basis seemed to me just what her beauty supplied."

"Her beauty of person?"

"Well, her beauty of everything. The impression she makes. She

has such variety and yet such harmony."

She considered him with one of her deep returns of indulgence--

returns out of all proportion to the irritations they flooded over.

"You're complete."

"You're always too personal," he good-humouredly said; "but that's

precisely how I wondered and wandered."

"If you mean," she went on, "that she was from the first for you

the most charming woman in the world, nothing's more simple. Only

that was an odd foundation."

"For what I reared on it?"

"For what you didn't!"

"Well, it was all not a fixed quantity. And it had for me--it has

still--such elements of strangeness. Her greater age than his, her

different world, traditions, association; her other opportunities,

liabilities, standards."

His friend listened with respect to his enumeration of these

disparities; then she disposed of them at a stroke. "Those things

are nothing when a woman's hit. It's very awful. She was hit."

Strether, on his side, did justice to that plea. "Oh of course I

saw she was hit. That she was hit was what we were busy with; that

she was hit was our great affair. But somehow I couldn't think of

her as down in the dust. And as put there by OUR little Chad!"

"Yet wasn't 'your' little Chad just your miracle?"

Strether admitted it. "Of course I moved among miracles. It was

all phantasmagoric. But the great fact was that so much of it was

none of my business--as I saw my business. It isn't even now."

His companion turned away on this, and it might well have been yet

again with the sharpness of a fear of how little his philosophy

could bring her personally. "I wish SHE could hear you!"

"Mrs. Newsome?"

"No--not Mrs. Newsome; since I understand you that it doesn't

matter now what Mrs. Newsome hears. Hasn't she heard

everything?"

"Practically--yes." He had thought a moment, but he went on. "You

wish Madame de Vionnet could hear me?"

"Madame de Vionnet." She had come back to him. "She thinks just

the contrary of what you say. That you distinctly judge her."

He turned over the scene as the two women thus placed together for

him seemed to give it. "She might have known--!"

"Might have known you don't?" Miss Gostrey asked as he let it drop.

"She was sure of it at first," she pursued as he said nothing; "she

took it for granted, at least, as any woman in her position would.

But after that she changed her mind; she believed you believed--"

"Well?"--he was curious.

"Why in her sublimity. And that belief had remained with her, I

make out, till the accident of the other day opened your eyes. For

that it did," said Maria, "open them--"

"She can't help"--he had taken it up--"being aware? No," he mused;

"I suppose she thinks of that even yet."

"Then they WERE closed? There you are! However, if you see her as

the most charming woman in the world it comes to the same thing.

And if you'd like me to tell her that you do still so see her--!"

Miss Gostrey, in short, offered herself for service to the end.

It was an offer he could temporarily entertain; but he decided.

"She knows perfectly how I see her."

"Not favourably enough, she mentioned to me, to wish ever to see

her again. She told me you had taken a final leave of her. She

says you've done with her."

"So I have."

Maria had a pause; then she spoke as if for conscience. "She

wouldn't have done with YOU. She feels she has lost you--

yet that she might have been better for you."

"Oh she has been quite good enough!" Strether laughed.

"She thinks you and she might at any rate have been friends."

"We might certainly. That's just"--he continued to laugh--

"why I'm going."

It was as if Maria could feel with this then at last that she had

done her best for each. But she had still an idea. "Shall I tell

her that?"

"No. Tell her nothing."

"Very well then." To which in the next breath Miss Gostrey added:

"Poor dear thing!"

Her friend wondered; then with raised eyebrows: "Me?"

"Oh no. Marie de Vionnet."

He accepted the correction, but he wondered still. "Are you so

sorry for her as that?"

It made her think a moment--made her even speak with a smile. But

she didn't really retract. "I'm sorry for us all!"

IV

He was to delay no longer to re-establish communication with Chad,

and we have just seen that he had spoken to Miss Gostrey of this

intention on hearing from her of the young man's absence. It was

not moreover only the assurance so given that prompted him; it was

the need of causing his conduct to square with another profession

still--the motive he had described to her as his sharpest for now

getting away. If he was to get away because of some of the

relations involved in staying, the cold attitude toward them might

look pedantic in the light of lingering on. He must do both

things; he must see Chad, but he must go. The more he thought of

the former of these duties the more he felt himself make a subject

of insistence of the latter. They were alike intensely present to

him as he sat in front of a quiet little cafe into which he had

dropped on quitting Maria's entresol. The rain that had spoiled

his evening with her was over; for it was still to him as if his

evening HAD been spoiled--though it mightn't have been wholly the

rain. It was late when he left the cafe, yet not too late; he

couldn't in any case go straight to bed, and he would walk round

by the Boulevard Malesherbes--rather far round--on his way home.

Present enough always was the small circumstance that had

originally pressed for him the spring of so big a difference--the

accident of little Bilham's appearance on the balcony of the mystic

troisieme at the moment of his first visit, and the effect of it on

his sense of what was then before him. He recalled his watch, his

wait, and the recognition that had proceeded from the young

stranger, that had played frankly into the air and had presently

brought him up--things smoothing the way for his first straight

step. He had since had occasion, a few times, to pass the house

without going in; but he had never passed it without again feeling

how it had then spoken to him. He stopped short to-night on coming

to sight of it: it was as if his last day were oddly copying his

first. The windows of Chad's apartment were open to the balcony--

a pair of them lighted; and a figure that had come out and taken up

little Bilham's attitude, a figure whose cigarette-spark he could

see leaned on the rail and looked down at him. It denoted however

no reappearance of his younger friend; it quickly defined itself in

the tempered darkness as Chad's more solid shape; so that Chad's

was the attention that after he had stepped forward into the street

and signalled, he easily engaged; Chad's was the voice that,

sounding into the night with promptness and seemingly with joy,

greeted him and called him up.

That the young man had been visible there just in this position

expressed somehow for Strether that, as Maria Gostrey had reported,

he had been absent and silent; and our friend drew breath on each

landing--the lift, at that hour, having ceased to work--before the

implications of the fact. He had been for a week intensely away,

away to a distance and alone; but he was more back than ever, and

the attitude in which Strether had surprised him was something more

than a return--it was clearly a conscious surrender. He had

arrived but an hour before, from London, from Lucerne, from Homburg,

from no matter where--though the visitor's fancy, on the staircase,

liked to fill it out; and after a bath, a talk with Baptiste and a

supper of light cold clever French things, which one could see the

remains of there in the circle of the lamp, pretty and ultra-Parisian,

he had come into the air again for a smoke, was occupied at the moment

of Strether's approach in what might have been called taking up

his life afresh. His life, his life!--Strether paused anew, on

the last flight, at this final rather breathless sense of what

Chad's life was doing with Chad's mother's emissary. It was

dragging him, at strange hours, up the staircases of the rich;

it was keeping him out of bed at the end of long hot days;

it was transforming beyond recognition the simple, subtle,

conveniently uniform thing that had anciently passed with him for a

life of his own. Why should it concern him that Chad was to be

fortified in the pleasant practice of smoking on balconies, of

supping on salads, of feeling his special conditions agreeably

reaffirm themselves, of finding reassurance in comparisons and

contrasts? There was no answer to such a question but that he was

still practically committed--he had perhaps never yet so much known it.

It made him feel old, and he would buy his railway-ticket--feeling,

no doubt, older--the next day; but he had meanwhile come up four

flights, counting the entresol, at midnight and without a lift, for

Chad's life. The young man, hearing him by this time, and with

Baptiste sent to rest, was already at the door; so that Strether

had before him in full visibility the cause in which he was labouring

and even, with the troisieme fairly gained, panting a little.

Chad offered him, as always, a welcome in which the cordial and the

formal--so far as the formal was the respectful--handsomely met;

and after he had expressed a hope that he would let him put him up

for the night Strether was in full possession of the key, as it

might have been called, to what had lately happened. If he had

just thought of himself as old Chad was at sight of him thinking of

him as older: he wanted to put him up for the night just because

he was ancient and weary. It could never be said the tenant of

these quarters wasn't nice to him; a tenant who, if he might

indeed now keep him, was probably prepared to work it all still

more thoroughly. Our friend had in fact the impression that with

the minimum of encouragement Chad would propose to keep him

indefinitely; an impression in the lap of which one of his own

possibilities seemed to sit. Madame de Vionnet had wished him to

stay--so why didn't that happily fit? He could enshrine himself

for the rest of his days in his young host's chambre d'ami and draw

out these days at his young host's expense: there could scarce be

greater logical expression of the countenance he had been moved to

give. There was literally a minute--it was strange enough--during

which he grasped the idea that as he WAS acting, as he could only

act, he was inconsistent. The sign that the inward forces he had

obeyed really hung together would be that--in default always of

another career--he should promote the good cause by mounting guard

on it. These things, during his first minutes, came and went; but

they were after all practically disposed of as soon as he had

mentioned his errand. He had come to say good-bye--yet that was

only a part; so that from the moment Chad accepted his farewell the

question of a more ideal affirmation gave way to something else.

He proceeded with the rest of his business. "You'll be a brute, you

know--you'll be guilty of the last infamy--if you ever forsake her."

That, uttered there at the solemn hour, uttered in the place that

was full of her influence, was the rest of his business; and when

once he had heard himself say it he felt that his message had never

before been spoken. It placed his present call immediately on

solid ground, and the effect of it was to enable him quite to play

with what we have called the key. Chad showed no shade of

embarrassment, but had none the less been troubled for him after

their meeting in the country; had had fears and doubts on the

subject of his comfort. He was disturbed, as it were, only FOR

him, and had positively gone away to ease him off, to let him down--

if it wasn't indeed rather to screw him up--the more gently.

Seeing him now fairly jaded he had come, with characteristic good

humour, all the way to meet him, and what Strether thereupon

supremely made out was that he would abound for him to the end in

conscientious assurances. This was what was between them while the

visitor remained; so far from having to go over old ground he found

his entertainer keen to agree to everything. It couldn't be put

too strongly for him that he'd be a brute. "Oh rather!--if I should

do anything of THAT sort. I hope you believe I really feel it."

"I want it," said Strether, "to be my last word of all to you.

I can't say more, you know; and I don't see how I can do more,

in every way, than I've done."

Chad took this, almost artlessly, as a direct allusion. "You've

seen her?"

"Oh yes--to say good-bye. And if I had doubted the truth of what I

tell you--"

"She'd have cleared up your doubt?" Chad understood--"rather"--

again! It even kept him briefly silent. But he made that up.

"She must have been wonderful."

"She WAS," Strether candidly admitted--all of which practically

told as a reference to the conditions created by the accident of

the previous week.

They appeared for a little to be looking back at it; and that came

out still more in what Chad next said. "I don't know what you've

really thought, all along; I never did know--for anything, with

you, seemed to be possible. But of course--of course--" Without

confusion, quite with nothing but indulgence, he broke down, he

pulled up. "After all, you understand. I spoke to you originally

only as I HAD to speak. There's only one way--isn't there?--about

such things. However," he smiled with a final philosophy, "I see

it's all right."

Strether met his eyes with a sense of multiplying thoughts. What

was it that made him at present, late at night and after journeys,

so renewedly, so substantially young? Strether saw in a moment

what it was--it was that he was younger again than Madame de Vionnet.

He himself said immediately none of the things that he was thinking;

he said something quite different. "You HAVE really been to a distance?"

"I've been to England." Chad spoke cheerfully and promptly, but gave

no further account of it than to say: "One must sometimes get off."

Strether wanted no more facts--he only wanted to justify, as it

were, his question. "Of course you do as you're free to do. But I

hope, this time, that you didn't go for ME."

"For very shame at bothering you really too much? My dear man,"

Chad laughed, "what WOULDn't I do for you?"

Strether's easy answer for this was that it was a disposition he

had exactly come to profit by. "Even at the risk of being in your

way I've waited on, you know, for a definite reason."

Chad took it in. "Oh yes--for us to make if possible a still

better impression." And he stood there happily exhaling his full

general consciousness. "I'm delighted to gather that you feel

we've made it."

There was a pleasant irony in the words, which his guest,

preoccupied and keeping to the point, didn't take up. "If I had

my sense of wanting the rest of the time--the time of their being

still on this side," he continued to explain--"I know now why I

wanted it."

He was as grave, as distinct, as a demonstrator before a

blackboard, and Chad continued to face him like an intelligent

pupil. "You wanted to have been put through the whole thing."

Strether again, for a moment, said nothing; he turned his eyes

away, and they lost themselves, through the open window, in the

dusky outer air. "I shall learn from the Bank here where they're

now having their letters, and my last word, which I shall write in

the morning and which they're expecting as my ultimatum, will so

immediately reach them." The light of his plural pronoun was

sufficiently reflected in his companion's face as he again met it;

and he completed his demonstration. He pursued indeed as if for

himself. "Of course I've first to justify what I shall do."

"You're justifying it beautifully!" Chad declared.

"It's not a question of advising you not to go," Strether said, "but

of absolutely preventing you, if possible, from so much as thinking

of it. Let me accordingly appeal to you by all you hold sacred."

Chad showed a surprise. "What makes you think me capable--?"

"You'd not only be, as I say, a brute; you'd be," his companion

went on in the same way, "a criminal of the deepest dye."

Chad gave a sharper look, as if to gauge a possible suspicion.

"I don't know what should make you think I'm tired of her."

Strether didn't quite know either, and such impressions, for the

imaginative mind, were always too fine, too floating, to produce on

the spot their warrant. There was none the less for him, in the

very manner of his host's allusion to satiety as a thinkable

motive, a slight breath of the ominous. "I feel how much more she

can do for you. She hasn't done it all yet. Stay with her at

least till she has."

"And leave her THEN?"

Chad had kept smiling, but its effect in Strether was a shade of

dryness. "Don't leave her BEFORE. When you've got all that can be

got--I don't say," he added a trifle grimly. "That will be the

proper time. But as, for you, from such a woman, there will always

be something to be got, my remark's not a wrong to her." Chad let

him go on, showing every decent deference, showing perhaps also a

candid curiosity for this sharper accent. "I remember you, you

know, as you were."

"An awful ass, wasn't I?"

The response was as prompt as if he had pressed a spring; it had a

ready abundance at which he even winced; so that he took a moment

to meet it. "You certainly then wouldn't have seemed worth all

you've let me in for. You've defined yourself better. Your value

has quintupled."

"Well then, wouldn't that be enough--?"

Chad had risked it jocosely, but Strether remained blank. "Enough?"

"If one SHOULD wish to live on one's accumulations?" After which,

however, as his friend appeared cold to the joke, the young man as

easily dropped it. "Of course I really never forget, night or day,

what I owe her. I owe her everything. I give you my word of

honour," he frankly rang out, "that I'm not a bit tired of her."

Strether at this only gave him a stare: the way youth could

express itself was again and again a wonder. He meant no harm,

though he might after all be capable of much; yet he spoke of being

"tired" of her almost as he might have spoken of being tired of

roast mutton for dinner. "She has never for a moment yet bored me--

never been wanting, as the cleverest women sometimes are, in tact.

She has never talked about her tact--as even they too sometimes talk;

but she has always had it. She has never had it more"--he handsomely

made the point--"than just lately." And he scrupulously went further.

"She has never been anything I could call a burden."

Strether for a moment said nothing; then he spoke gravely, with his

shade of dryness deepened. "Oh if you didn't do her justice--!"

"I SHOULD be a beast, eh?"

Strether devoted no time to saying what he would be; THAT, visibly,

would take them far. If there was nothing for it but to repeat,

however, repetition was no mistake. "You owe her everything--very

much more than she can ever owe you. You've in other words duties

to her, of the most positive sort; and I don't see what other

duties--as the others are presented to you--can be held to go

before them."

Chad looked at him with a smile. "And you know of course about the

others, eh?--since it's you yourself who have done the presenting."

"Much of it--yes--and to the best of my ability. But not all--from

the moment your sister took my place."

"She didn't," Chad returned. "Sally took a place, certainly; but

it was never, I saw from the first moment, to be yours. No one--

with us--will ever take yours. It wouldn't be possible."

"Ah of course," sighed Strether, "I knew it. I believe you're

right. No one in the world, I imagine, was ever so portentously

solemn. There I am," he added with another sigh, as if weary

enough, on occasion, of this truth. "I was made so."

Chad appeared for a little to consider the way he was made;

he might for this purpose have measured him up and down.

His conclusion favoured the fact. "YOU have never needed any one

to make you better. There has never been any one good enough.

They couldn't," the young man declared.

His friend hesitated. "I beg your pardon. They HAVE."

Chad showed, not without amusement, his doubt. "Who then?"

Strether--though a little dimly--smiled at him. "Women--too."

"'Two'?"--Chad stared and laughed. "Oh I don't believe, for such

work, in any more than one! So you're proving too much. And what

IS beastly, at all events," he added, "is losing you."

Strether had set himself in motion for departure, but at this he

paused. "Are you afraid?"

"Afraid--?"

"Of doing wrong. I mean away from my eye." Before Chad could

speak, however, he had taken himself up. "I AM, certainly," he

laughed, "prodigious."

"Yes, you spoil us for all the stupid--!" This might have been, on

Chad's part, in its extreme emphasis, almost too freely

extravagant; but it was full, plainly enough, of the intention of

comfort, it carried with it a protest against doubt and a promise,

positively, of performance. Picking up a hat in the vestibule he

came out with his friend, came downstairs, took his arm,

affectionately, as to help and guide him, treating him if not

exactly as aged and infirm, yet as a noble eccentric who appealed

to tenderness, and keeping on with him, while they walked, to the

next corner and the next. "You needn't tell me, you needn't tell

me!"--this again as they proceeded, he wished to make Strether

feel. What he needn't tell him was now at last, in the geniality

of separation, anything at all it concerned him to know. He knew,

up to the hilt--that really came over Chad; he understood, felt,

recorded his vow; and they lingered on it as they had lingered in

their walk to Strether's hotel the night of their first meeting.

The latter took, at this hour, all he could get; he had given all

he had had to give; he was as depleted as if he had spent his last

sou. But there was just one thing for which, before they broke

off, Chad seemed disposed slightly to bargain. His companion needn't,

as he said, tell him, but he might himself mention that he had been

getting some news of the art of advertisement. He came out quite

suddenly with this announcement while Strether wondered if his revived

interest were what had taken him, with strange inconsequence, over

to London. He appeared at all events to have been looking into the

question and had encountered a revelation. Advertising scientifically

worked presented itself thus as the great new force. "It really

does the thing, you know."

They were face to face under the street-lamp as they had been the

first night, and Strether, no doubt, looked blank. "Affects, you

mean, the sale of the object advertised?"

"Yes--but affects it extraordinarily; really beyond what one had

supposed. I mean of course when it's done as one makes out that in

our roaring age, it CAN be done. I've been finding out a little,

though it doubtless doesn't amount to much more than what you

originally, so awfully vividly--and all, very nearly, that first

night--put before me. It's an art like another, and infinite like

all the arts." He went on as if for the joke of it--almost as if

his friend's face amused him. "In the hands, naturally, of a master.

The right man must take hold. With the right man to work it

c'est un monde."

Strether had watched him quite as if, there on the pavement without

a pretext, he had begun to dance a fancy step. "Is what you're

thinking of that you yourself, in the case you have in mind, would

be the right man?"

Chad had thrown back his light coat and thrust each of his thumbs

into an armhole of his waistcoat; in which position his fingers

played up and down. "Why, what is he but what you yourself, as I

say, took me for when you first came out?"

Strether felt a little faint, but he coerced his attention. "Oh

yes, and there's no doubt that, with your natural parts, you'd have

much in common with him. Advertising is clearly at this time of

day the secret of trade. It's quite possible it will be open to you--

giving the whole of your mind to it--to make the whole place hum

with you. Your mother's appeal is to the whole of your mind, and

that's exactly the strength of her case."

Chad's fingers continued to twiddle, but he had something of a drop.

"Ah we've been through my mother's case!"

"So I thought. Why then do you speak of the matter?"

"Only because it was part of our original discussion. To wind up

where we began, my interest's purely platonic. There at any rate

the fact is--the fact of the possible. I mean the money in it."

"Oh damn the money in it!" said Strether. And then as the young

man's fixed smile seemed to shine out more strange: "Shall you

give your friend up for the money in it?"

Chad preserved his handsome grimace as well as the rest of his

attitude. "You're not altogether--in your so great 'solemnity'--

kind. Haven't I been drinking you in--showing you all I feel

you're worth to me? What have I done, what am I doing, but cleave

to her to the death? The only thing is," he good-humouredly

explained, "that one can't but have it before one, in the cleaving--

the point where the death comes in. Don't be afraid for THAT.

It's pleasant to a fellow's feelings," he developed, "to 'size-up'

the bribe he applies his foot to."

"Oh then if all you want's a kickable surface the bribe's enormous."

"Good. Then there it goes!" Chad administered his kick with fantastic

force and sent an imaginary object flying. It was accordingly as if

they were once more rid of the question and could come back to what

really concerned him. "Of course I shall see you tomorrow."

But Strether scarce heeded the plan proposed for this; he had still

the impression--not the slighter for the simulated kick--of an

irrelevant hornpipe or jig. "You're restless."

"Ah," returned Chad as they parted, "you're exciting."

V

He had, however, within two days, another separation to face.

He had sent Maria Gostrey a word early, by hand, to ask if he might

come to breakfast; in consequence of which, at noon, she awaited

him in the cool shade of her little Dutch-looking dining-room.

This retreat was at the back of the house, with a view of a scrap

of old garden that had been saved from modern ravage; and though he

had on more than one other occasion had his legs under its small

and peculiarly polished table of hospitality, the place had never

before struck him as so sacred to pleasant knowledge, to intimate

charm, to antique order, to a neatness that was almost august.

To sit there was, as he had told his hostess before, to see life

reflected for the time in ideally kept pewter; which was somehow

becoming, improving to life, so that one's eyes were held and

comforted. Strether's were comforted at all events now--and the

more that it was the last time--with the charming effect, on the

board bare of a cloth and proud of its perfect surface, of the

small old crockery and old silver, matched by the more substantial

pieces happily disposed about the room. The specimens of vivid

Delf, in particular had the dignity of family portraits; and it was

in the midst of them that our friend resignedly expressed himself.

He spoke even with a certain philosophic humour. "There's nothing

more to wait for; I seem to have done a good day's work. I've let

them have it all round. I've seen Chad, who has been to London and

come back. He tells me I'm 'exciting,' and I seem indeed pretty

well to have upset every one. I've at any rate excited HIM. He's

distinctly restless."

"You've excited ME," Miss Gostrey smiled. "I'M distinctly restless."

"Oh you were that when I found you. It seems to me I've rather got

you out of it. What's this," he asked as he looked about him, "but

a haunt of ancient peace?"

"I wish with all my heart," she presently replied, "I could make

you treat it as a haven of rest." On which they fronted each other,

across the table, as if things unuttered were in the air.

Strether seemed, in his way, when he next spoke, to take some of

them up. "It wouldn't give me--that would be the trouble--what it

will, no doubt, still give you. I'm not," he explained, leaning

back in his chair, but with his eyes on a small ripe round melon--

"in real harmony with what surrounds me. You ARE. I take it too hard.

You DON'T. It makes--that's what it comes to in the end--a fool of me."

Then at a tangent, "What has he been doing in London?" he demanded.

"Ah one may go to London," Maria laughed. "You know I did."

Yes--he took the reminder. "And you brought ME back." He brooded

there opposite to her, but without gloom. "Whom has Chad brought?

He's full of ideas. And I wrote to Sarah," he added, "the first

thing this morning. So I'm square. I'm ready for them."

She neglected certain parts of this speech in the interest of

others. "Marie said to me the other day that she felt him to have

the makings of an immense man of business."

"There it is. He's the son of his father!"

"But SUCH a father!"

"Ah just the right one from that point of view! But it isn't his

father in him," Strether added, "that troubles me."

"What is it then?" He came back to his breakfast; he partook

presently of the charming melon, which she liberally cut for him;

and it was only after this that he met her question. Then moreover

it was but to remark that he'd answer her presently. She waited,

she watched, she served him and amused him, and it was perhaps with

this last idea that she soon reminded him of his having never even

yet named to her the article produced at Woollett. "Do you

remember our talking of it in London--that night at the play?"

Before he could say yes, however, she had put it to him for other

matters. Did he remember, did he remember--this and that of their

first days? He remembered everything, bringing up with humour

even things of which she professed no recollection, things she

vehemently denied; and falling back above all on the great

interest of their early time, the curiosity felt by both of them

as to where he would "come out." They had so assumed it was to be

in some wonderful place--they had thought of it as so very MUCH

out. Well, that was doubtless what it had been--since he had come

out just there. He was out, in truth, as far as it was possible

to be, and must now rather bethink himself of getting in again.

He found on the spot the image of his recent history; he was like

one of the figures of the old clock at Berne. THEY came out, on

one side, at their hour, jigged along their little course in the

public eye, and went in on the other side. He too had jigged his

little course--him too a modest retreat awaited. He offered now,

should she really like to know, to name the great product of

Woollett. It would be a great commentary on everything. At this

she stopped him off; she not only had no wish to know, but she

wouldn't know for the world. She had done with the products of

Woollett--for all the good she had got from them. She desired no

further news of them, and she mentioned that Madame de Vionnet

herself had, to her knowledge, lived exempt from the information

he was ready to supply. She had never consented to receive it,

though she would have taken it, under stress, from Mrs. Pocock.

But it was a matter about which Mrs. Pocock appeared to have had

little to say--never sounding the word--and it didn't signify

now. There was nothing clearly for Maria Gostrey that signified

now--save one sharp point, that is, to which she came in time.

"I don't know whether it's before you as a possibility that,

left to himself, Mr. Chad may after all go back. I judge that it

IS more or less so before you, from what you just now said of him."

Her guest had his eyes on her, kindly but attentively, as if

foreseeing what was to follow this. "I don't think it will be for

the money." And then as she seemed uncertain: "I mean I don't

believe it will be for that he'll give her up."

"Then he WILL give her up?"

Strether waited a moment, rather slow and deliberate now, drawing

out a little this last soft stage, pleading with her in various

suggestive and unspoken ways for patience and understanding.

"What were you just about to ask me?"

"Is there anything he can do that would make you patch it up?"

"With Mrs. Newsome?"

Her assent, as if she had had a delicacy about sounding the name,

was only in her face; but she added with it: "Or is there

anything he can do that would make HER try it?"

"To patch it up with me?" His answer came at last in a conclusive

headshake. "There's nothing any one can do. It's over. Over for

both of us."

Maria wondered, seemed a little to doubt. "Are you so sure for her?"

"Oh yes--sure now. Too much has happened. I'm different for her."

She took it in then, drawing a deeper breath. "I see. So that as

she's different for YOU--"

"Ah but," he interrupted, "she's not." And as Miss Gostrey wondered

again: "She's the same. She's more than ever the same.

But I do what I didn't before--I SEE her."

He spoke gravely and as if responsibly--since he had to pronounce;

and the effect of it was slightly solemn, so that she simply exclaimed

"Oh!" Satisfied and grateful, however, she showed in her own next

words an acceptance of his statement. "What then do you go home to?"

He had pushed his plate a little away, occupied with another side

of the matter; taking refuge verily in that side and feeling so

moved that he soon found himself on his feet. He was affected in

advance by what he believed might come from her, and he would have

liked to forestall it and deal with it tenderly; yet in the

presence of it he wished still more to be--though as smoothly as

possible--deterrent and conclusive. He put her question by for

the moment; he told her more about Chad. "It would have been

impossible to meet me more than he did last night on the question

of the infamy of not sticking to her."

"Is that what you called it for him--'infamy'?"

"Oh rather! I described to him in detail the base creature he'd

be, and he quite agrees with me about it."

"So that it's really as if you had nailed him?"

"Quite really as if--! I told him I should curse him."

"Oh," she smiled, "you HAVE done it." And then having thought again:

"You CAN'T after that propose--!" Yet she scanned his face.

"Propose again to Mrs. Newsome?"

She hesitated afresh, but she brought it out. "I've never believed,

you know, that you did propose. I always believed it was really she--

and, so far as that goes, I can understand it. What I mean is,"

she explained, "that with such a spirit--the spirit of curses!--

your breach is past mending. She has only to know what you've done

to him never again to raise a finger."

"I've done," said Strether, "what I could--one can't do more.

He protests his devotion and his horror. But I'm not sure I've

saved him. He protests too much. He asks how one can dream of

his being tired. But he has all life before him."

Maria saw what he meant. "He's formed to please."

"And it's our friend who has formed him." Strether felt in it the

strange irony.

"So it's scarcely his fault!"

"It's at any rate his danger. I mean," said Strether, "it's hers.

But she knows it."

"Yes, she knows it. And is your idea," Miss Gostrey asked, "that

there was some other woman in London?"

"Yes. No. That is I HAVE no ideas. I'm afraid of them.

I've done with them." And he put out his hand to her. "Good-bye."

It brought her back to her unanswered question. "To what do you go

home?"

"I don't know. There will always be something."

"To a great difference," she said as she kept his hand.

"A great difference--no doubt. Yet I shall see what I can make of it."

"Shall you make anything so good--?" But, as if remembering what

Mrs. Newsome had done, it was as far as she went.

He had sufficiently understood. "So good as this place at this

moment? So good as what YOU make of everything you touch?"

He took a moment to say, for, really and truly, what stood about him

there in her offer--which was as the offer of exquisite service, of

lightened care, for the rest of his days--might well have tempted.

It built him softly round, it roofed him warmly over, it rested,

all so firm, on selection. And what ruled selection was beauty and

knowledge. It was awkward, it was almost stupid, not to seem to

prize such things; yet, none the less, so far as they made his

opportunity they made it only for a moment. She'd moreover

understand--she always understood.

That indeed might be, but meanwhile she was going on.

"There's nothing, you know, I wouldn't do for you."

"Oh yes--I know."

"There's nothing," she repeated, "in all the world."

"I know. I know. But all the same I must go." He had got it at last.

"To be right."

"To be right?"

She had echoed it in vague deprecation, but he felt it already

clear for her. "That, you see, is my only logic.

Not, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself."

She thought. "But with your wonderful impressions you'll have

got a great deal."

"A great deal"--he agreed. "But nothing like YOU. It's you who

would make me wrong!"

Honest and fine, she couldn't greatly pretend she didn't see it.

Still she could pretend just a little. "But why should you be so

dreadfully right?"

"That's the way that--if I must go--you yourself would be the first

to want me. And I can't do anything else."

So then she had to take it, though still with her defeated protest.

"It isn't so much your BEING 'right'--it's your horrible sharp eye

for what makes you so."

"Oh but you're just as bad yourself. You can't resist me when I

point that out."

She sighed it at last all comically, all tragically, away.

"I can't indeed resist you."

"Then there we are!" said Strether.