

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY.

XXXIX.

ISABEL had not seen much of Madame Merle since her marriage, this lady having indulged in frequent absences from Rome. At one time she had spent six months in England; at another she had passed a portion of a winter in Paris. She had made numerous visits to distant friends, and gave countenance to the idea that for the future she should be a less inveterate Roman than in the past. As she had been inveterate in the past only in the sense of constantly having an apartment in one of the sunniest gaps of the Pincian, — an apartment which often stood empty, — this suggested a prospect of almost constant absence, a danger which Isabel at one period had been much inclined to deplore. Familiarity had modified in some degree her first impression of Madame Merle, but it had not essentially altered it; there was still a kind of wonder of admiration in it. Madame Merle was armed at all points; it was a pleasure to see a person so completely equipped for the social battle. She carried her flag discreetly, but her weapons were polished steel, and she used them with a skill which struck Isabel as more and more that of a veteran. She was never weary, never overcome with disgust; she never appeared to need rest or consolation. She had her own ideas; she had of old exposed a great many of them to Isabel, who knew also that under an appearance of extreme self-control her highly-cultivated friend concealed a rich sensibility. But her will was mistress of her life; there was something brilliant in the way she kept going. It was as if she had learned the secret of it, — as if the art of life were some clever trick that she had guessed. Isabel, as she herself grew older, became acquainted

with revulsions, with disgust; there were days when the world looked black, and she asked herself with some peremptoriness what it was that she was pretending to live for. Her old habit had been to live by enthusiasm, to fall in love with suddenly-perceived possibilities, with the idea of a new attempt. As a young girl, she used to proceed from one little exaltation to the other; there were scarcely any dull places between. But Madame Merle had suppressed enthusiasm; she fell in love nowadays with nothing; she lived entirely by reason, by wisdom. There were hours when Isabel would have given anything for lessons in this art; if Madame Merle had been near, she would have made an appeal to her. She had become aware, more than before, of the advantage of being like that, — of having made one's self a firm surface, a sort of corselet of silver. But, as I say, it was not till the winter, during which we lately renewed acquaintance with our heroine, that Madame Merle made a continuous stay in Rome. Isabel now saw more of her than she had done since her marriage; but by this time Isabel's needs and inclinations had considerably changed. It was not at present to Madame Merle that she would have applied for instruction; she had lost the desire to know this lady's clever trick. If she had troubles she must keep them to herself, and if life was difficult it would not make it easier to confess herself beaten. Madame Merle was doubtless of great use to herself, and an ornament to any circle; but was she, would she be, of use to others in periods of refined embarrassment? The best way to profit by Madame Merle — this, indeed, Isabel had always thought — was to imitate her, to be as firm and bright as she. She recognized no embarrassments, and Isabel, consid-

ering this fact, determined, for the fiftieth time, to brush aside her own. It seemed to her, too, on the renewal of an intercourse which had virtually been interrupted, that Madame Merle was changed; that she pushed to the extreme a certain rather artificial fear of being indiscreet. Ralph Touchett, we know, had been of the opinion that she was prone to exaggeration, to forcing the note; was apt, in the vulgar phrase, to overdo it. Isabel had never admitted this charge, — had never, indeed, quite understood it; Madame Merle's conduct, to her perception, always bore the stamp of good taste, was always "quiet." But in this matter of not wishing to intrude upon the inner life of the Osmond family, it at last occurred to our heroine that Madame Merle overdid it a little. That, of course, was not the best taste; that was rather violent. She remembered too much that Isabel was married; that she had now other interests; that though she, Madame Merle, had known Gilbert Osmond and his little Pansy very well, better, almost, than any one, she was after all not one of them. She was on her guard; she never spoke of their affairs till she was asked, even pressed, — as when her opinion was wanted; she had a dread of seeming to meddle. Madame Merle was as candid as we know, and one day she candidly expressed this dread to Isabel.

"I must be on my guard," she said; "I might so easily, without suspecting it, offend you. You would be right to be offended, even if my intention should have been of the purest. I must not forget that I knew your husband long before you did; I must not let that betray me. If you were a silly woman, you might be jealous. You are not a silly woman; I know that perfectly. But neither am I; therefore I am determined not to get into trouble. A little harm is very soon done; a mistake is made before one knows it. Of course, if I had wished to make love to your

husband, I had ten years to do it in, and nothing to prevent; so it is n't likely I shall begin to-day, when I am so much less attractive than I was. But if I were to annoy you by seeming to take a place that does n't belong to me, you would n't make that reflection; you would simply say that I was forgetting certain differences. I am determined not to forget them. Of course a good friend is n't always thinking of that; one does n't suspect one's friends of injustice. I don't suspect you, my dear, in the least; but I suspect human nature. Don't think I make myself uncomfortable; I am not always watching myself. I think I sufficiently prove it in talking to you as I do now. All I wish to say is, however, that if you were to be jealous — that is the form it would take — I should be sure to think it was a little my fault. It certainly would n't be your husband's."

Isabel had had three years to think over Mrs. Touchett's theory, that Madame Merle had made Gilbert Osmond's marriage. We know how she had at first received it. Madame Merle might have made Gilbert Osmond's marriage, but she certainly had not made Isabel Archer's. That was the work of — Isabel scarcely knew what: of nature, of Providence, of fortune, of the eternal mystery of things. It was true that her aunt's complaint had been not so much of Madame Merle's activity as of her duplicity; she had brought about the marriage, and then she had denied her guilt. Such guilt would not have been great, to Isabel's mind; she could n't make a crime of Madame Merle's having been the cause of the most fertile friendship she had ever formed. That occurred to her just before her marriage, after her little discussion with her aunt. If Madame Merle had desired the event, she could only say it had been a very happy thought. With her, moreover, she had been perfectly straightforward; she had never concealed her high opinion of Gilbert Osmond. After her mar-

riage Isabel discovered that her husband took a less comfortable view of the matter; he seldom spoke of Madame Merle, and when his wife alluded to her he usually let the allusion drop.

“Don't you like her?” Isabel had once said to him. “She thinks a great deal of you.”

“I will tell you once for all,” Osmond had answered. “I liked her once better than I do to-day. I am tired of her, and I am rather ashamed of it. She is so good! I am glad she is not in Italy; it's a sort of rest. Don't talk of her too much; it seems to bring her back. She will come back in plenty of time.”

Madame Merle, in fact, had come back before it was too late, — too late, I mean, to recover whatever advantage she might have lost. But meantime, if, as I have said, she was somewhat changed, Isabel's feelings were also altered. Her consciousness of the situation was as acute as of old, but it was much less satisfying. A dissatisfied mind, whatever else it lack, is rarely in want of reasons; they bloom as thick as buttercups in June. The fact of Madame Merle having had a hand in Gilbert Osmond's marriage ceased to be one of her titles to consideration; it seemed, after all, that there was not so much to thank her for. As time went on there was less and less; and Isabel once said to herself that perhaps without her these things would not have been. This reflection, however, was instantly stifled; Isabel felt a sort of horror at having made it. “Whatever happens to me, let me not be unjust,” she said; “let me bear my burdens myself, and not shift them upon others!” This disposition was tested, eventually, by that ingenious apology for her present conduct which Madame Merle saw fit to make, and of which I have given a sketch; for there was something irritating — there was almost an air of mockery — in her neat discriminations and clear convictions. In Isabel's mind to-day there was nothing

clear; there was a confusion of regrets, a complication of fears. She felt helpless as she turned away from her brilliant friend, who had just made the statements I have quoted. Madame Merle knew so little what she was thinking of! Moreover, she herself was so unable to explain. Jealous of her, — jealous of her with Gilbert? The idea just then suggested no near reality. She almost wished that jealousy had been possible; it would be a kind of refreshment. Jealousy, after all, was in a sense one of the symptoms of happiness. Madame Merle, however, was wise; it would seem that she knew Isabel better than Isabel knew herself. This young woman had always been fertile in resolutions, many of them of an elevated character; but at no period had they flourished (in the privacy of her heart) more richly than to-day. It is true that they all had a family likeness; they might have been summed up in the determination that if she was to be unhappy it should not be by a fault of her own. The poor girl had always had a great desire to do her best, and she had not as yet been seriously discouraged. She wished, therefore, to hold fast to justice, — not to pay herself by petty revenges. To associate Madame Merle with her disappointment would be a petty revenge, especially as the pleasure she might derive from it would be perfectly insincere. It might feed her sense of bitterness, but it would not loosen her bonds. It was impossible to pretend that she had not acted with her eyes open; if ever a girl was a free agent, she had been. A girl in love was doubtless not a free agent; but the sole source of her mistake had been within herself. There had been no plot, no snare; she had looked, and considered, and chosen. When a woman had made such a mistake, there was only one way to repair it, — to accept it. One folly was enough, especially when it was to last forever; a second one would not much set it off. In this vow of reticence

there was a certain nobleness which kept Isabel going; but Madame Merle had been right, for all that, in taking her precautions.

One day, about a month after Ralph Touchett's arrival in Rome, Isabel came back from a walk with Pansy. It was not only a part of her general determination to be just that she was at present very thankful for Pansy. It was a part of her tenderness for things that were pure and weak. Pansy was dear to her, and there was nothing in her life so much as it should be as the young girl's attachment and the pleasantness of feeling it. It was like a soft presence, — like a small hand in her own; on Pansy's part it was more than an affection, — it was a kind of faith. On her own side her sense of Pansy's dependence was more than a pleasure; it operated as a command, as a definite reason when motives threatened to fail her. She had said to herself that we must take our duty where we find it, and that we must look for it as much as possible. Pansy's sympathy was a kind of admonition; it seemed to say that here was an opportunity. An opportunity for what Isabel could hardly have said; in general, to be more for the child than the child was able to be for herself. Isabel could have smiled, in these days, to remember that her little companion had once been ambiguous; for she now perceived that Pansy's ambiguities were simply her own grossness of vision. She had been unable to believe that any one could care so much, so extraordinarily much, to please. But since then she had seen this delicate faculty in operation, and she knew what to think of it. It was the whole creature, — it was a sort of genius. Pansy had no pride to interfere with it, and though she was constantly extending her conquests she took no credit for them. The two were constantly together; Mrs. Osmond was rarely seen without her step-daughter. Isabel liked her company; it had the

effect of one's carrying a nosegay composed all of the same flower. And then not to neglect Pansy, not under any provocation to neglect her, — this she had made an article of religion. The young girl had every appearance of being happier in Isabel's society than in that of any one save her father, whom she admired with an intensity justified by the fact that, as paternity was an exquisite pleasure to Gilbert Osmond, he had always been elaborately soft. Isabel knew that Pansy liked immensely to be with her and studied the means of pleasing her. She had decided that the best way of pleasing her was negative, and consisted in not giving her trouble, — a conviction which certainly could not have had any reference to trouble already existing. She was therefore ingeniously passive and almost imaginatively docile; she was careful even to moderate the eagerness with which she assented to Isabel's propositions, and which might have implied that she thought otherwise. She never interrupted, never asked social questions, and though she delighted in approbation, to the point of turning pale when it came to her, never held out her hand for it. She only looked toward it wistfully, — an attitude which, as she grew older, made her eyes the prettiest in the world. When, during the second winter at the Palazzo Roccanera, she began to go to parties, to dances, she always, at a reasonable hour, lest Mrs. Osmond should be tired, was the first to propose departure. Isabel appreciated the sacrifice of the late dances, for she knew that Pansy had a passionate pleasure in this exercise, taking her steps to the music like a conscientious fairy. Society, moreover, had no drawbacks for her; she liked even the tiresome parts, — the heat of ball-rooms, the dullness of dinners, the crush at the door, the awkward waiting for the carriage. During the day, in this vehicle, beside Isabel, she sat in a little fixed appreciative posture,

bending forward and faintly smiling, as if she had been taken to drive for the first time.

On the day I speak of they had been driven out of one of the gates of the city, and at the end of half an hour had left the carriage to await them by the roadside, while they walked away over the short grass of the Campagna, which even in the winter months is sprinkled with delicate flowers. This was almost a daily habit with Isabel, who was fond of a walk, and stepped quickly, though not so quickly as when she first came to Europe. It was not the form of exercise that Pansy loved best, but she liked it, because she liked everything; and she moved with a shorter undulation beside her step-mother, who afterwards, on their return to Rome, paid a tribute to Pansy's preferences by making the circuit of the Pincian or the Villa Borghese. Pansy had gathered a handful of flowers in a sunny hollow, far from the walls of Rome, and on reaching the Palazzo Roccanera she went straight to her room, to put them into water. Isabel passed into the drawing-room, the one she herself usually occupied, the second in order from the large antechamber which was entered from the staircase, and in which even Gilbert Osmond's rich devices had not been able to correct a look of rather grand nudity. Just beyond the threshold of the drawing-room she stopped short, the reason for her doing so being that she had received an impression. The impression had, in strictness, nothing unprecedented; but she felt it as something new, and the soundlessness of her step gave her time to take in the scene before she interrupted it. Madame Merle stood there in her bonnet, and Gilbert Osmond was talking to her; for a minute they were unaware that she had come in. Isabel had often seen that before, certainly; but what she had not seen, or at least had not noticed, was that their dialogue had for the moment converted

itself into a sort of familiar silence, from which she instantly perceived that her entrance would startle them. Madame Merle was standing on the rug, a little way from the fire; Osmond was in a deep chair, leaning back and looking at her. Her head was erect, as usual, but her eyes were bent upon his. What struck Isabel first was that he was sitting, while Madame Merle stood; there was an anomaly in this that arrested her. Then she perceived that they had arrived at a desultory pause in their exchange of ideas, and were musing, face to face, with the freedom of old friends who sometimes exchange ideas without uttering them. There was nothing shocking in this; they were old friends in fact. But the thing made an image, lasting only a moment, like a sudden flicker of light. Their relative position, their absorbed mutual gaze, struck her as something detected. But it was all over by the time she had fairly seen it. Madame Merle had seen her, and had welcomed her without moving; Gilbert Osmond, on the other hand, had instantly jumped up. He presently murmured something about wanting a walk, and after having asked Madame Merle to excuse him he left the room.

"I came to see you, thinking you would have come in; and as you had not, I waited for you," Madame Merle said.

"Did n't he ask you to sit down?" asked Isabel, smiling.

Madame Merle looked about her.

"Ah, it's very true; I was going away."

"You must stay now."

"Certainly. I came for a reason; I have something on my mind."

"I have told you that before," Isabel said, — "that it takes something extraordinary to bring you to this house."

"And you know what I have told you, — that whether I come or whether I stay away I have always the same motive, the affection I bear you."

"Yes, you have told me that."

"You look just now as if you did n't believe me," said Madame Merle.

"Ah," Isabel answered, "the profundity of your motives, — that is the last thing I doubt."

"You doubt sooner of the sincerity of my words."

Isabel shook her head gravely. "I know you have always been kind to me."

"As often as you would let me. You don't always take it; then one has to let you alone. It's not to do you a kindness, however, that I have come to-day; it's quite another affair. I have come to get rid of a trouble of my own, — to make it over to you. I have been talking to your husband about it."

"I am surprised at that; he does n't like troubles."

"Especially other people's; I know that. But neither do you, I suppose. At any rate, whether you do or not, you must help me. It's about poor Mr. Rosier."

"Ah," said Isabel, reflectively, "it's his trouble, then, not yours."

"He has succeeded in saddling me with it. He comes to see me ten times a week, to talk about Pansy."

"Yes, he wants to marry her. I know all about it."

Madame Merle hesitated a moment. "I gathered from your husband that perhaps you did n't."

"How should he know what I know? He has never spoken to me of the matter."

"It is probably because he does n't know how to speak of it."

"It's nevertheless a sort of question in which he is rarely at fault."

"Yes, because as a general thing he knows perfectly well what to think. To-day he does n't."

"Have n't you been telling him?" Isabel asked.

Madame Merle gave a bright, voluntary smile. "Do you know you're a little dry?"

"Yes; I can't help it. Mr. Rosier has also talked to me."

"In that there is some reason. You are so near the child."

"Ah," said Isabel, "for all the comfort I have given him! If you think me dry, I wonder what he thinks."

"I believe he thinks you can do more than you have done."

"I can do nothing."

"You can do more, at least, than I. I don't know what mysterious connection he may have discovered between me and Pansy; but he came to me from the first, as if I held his fortune in my hand. Now he keeps coming back, to spur me up, to know what hope there is, to pour out his feelings."

"He is very much in love," said Isabel.

"Very much, — for him."

"Very much for Pansy, you might say as well."

Madame Merle dropped her eyes a moment. "Don't you think she's attractive?"

"She is the dearest little person possible; but she is very limited."

"She ought to be all the easier for Mr. Rosier to love. Mr. Rosier is not unlimited."

"No," said Isabel; "he has about the extent of one's pocket handkerchief, — the small ones, with lace." Her humor had lately turned a good deal to sarcasm, but in a moment she was ashamed of exercising it on so innocent an object as Pansy's suitor. "He is very kind, very honest," she presently added; "and he is not such a fool as he seems."

"He assures me that she delights in him," said Madame Merle.

"I don't know; I have not asked her."

"You have never sounded her a little?"

"It's not my place; it's her father's."

"Ah, you're too literal!" said Madame Merle.

"I must judge for myself."

Madame Merle gave her smile again. "It is n't easy to help you."

"To help me?" said Isabel, very seriously. "What do you mean?"

"It's easy to displease you. Don't you see how wise I am to be careful? I notify you, at any rate, as I notified Osmond, that I wash my hands of the love affairs of Miss Pansy and Mr. Edward Rosier. *Je n'y peux rien, moi!* I can't talk to Pansy about him. Especially," added Madame Merle, "as I don't think him a paragon of husbands."

Isabel reflected a little; after which, with a smile, "You don't wash your hands, then!" she said. Then she added, in another tone, "You can't; you are too much interested."

Madame Merle slowly rose; she had given Isabel a look as rapid as the intimation that had gleamed before our heroine a few moments before. Only, this time Isabel saw nothing. "Ask him the next time, and you will see."

"I can't ask him; he has ceased to come to the house. Gilbert has let him know that he is not welcome."

"Ah, yes," said Madame Merle, "I forgot that, though it's the burden of his lamentation. He says Osmond has insulted him. All the same," she went on, "Osmond does n't dislike him as much as he thinks." She had got up, as if to close the conversation, but she lingered, looking about her, and had evidently more to say. Isabel perceived this, and even saw the point she had in view; but Isabel also had her own reasons for not opening the way.

"That must have pleased him, if you have told him," she answered, smiling.

"Certainly I have told him; as far as that goes, I have encouraged him. I have preached patience; have said that his case is not desperate, if he will only hold his tongue and be quiet. Unfortunately he has taken it into his head to be jealous."

"Jealous?"

"Jealous of Lord Warburton, who, he says, is always here."

Isabel, who was tired, had remained sitting; but at this she also rose. "Ah!" she exclaimed simply, moving slowly to the fire-place. Madame Merle observed her as she passed, and as she stood a moment before the mantel-glass, pushing into its place a wandering tress of hair.

"Poor Mr. Rosier keeps saying that there is nothing impossible in Lord Warburton falling in love with Pansy," Madame Merle went on.

Isabel was silent a little; she turned away from the glass. "It is true, — there is nothing impossible," she rejoined at last, gravely and more gently.

"So I have had to admit to Mr. Rosier. So, too, your husband thinks."

"That I don't know."

"Ask him, and you will see."

"I shall not ask him," said Isabel.

"Excuse me; I forgot that you had pointed that out. Of course," Madame Merle added, "you have had infinitely more observation of Lord Warburton's behavior than I."

"I see no reason why I should n't tell you that he likes my step-daughter very much."

Madame Merle gave one of her quick looks again. "Likes her, you mean — as Mr. Rosier means?"

"I don't know how Mr. Rosier means, but Lord Warburton has let me know that he is charmed with Pansy."

"And you have never told Osmond?" This observation was immediate, precipitate; it almost burst from Madame Merle's lips.

Isabel smiled a little. "I suppose he will know in time; Lord Warburton has a tongue, and knows how to express himself."

Madame Merle instantly became conscious that she had spoken more quickly than usual, and the reflection brought the color to her cheek. She gave the treacherous impulse time to subside, and

then she said, as if she had been thinking it over a little: "That would be better than marrying poor Mr. Rosier."

"Much better, I think."

"It would be very delightful; it would be a great marriage. It is really very kind of him."

"Very kind of him?"

"To drop his eyes on a simple little girl."

"I don't see that."

"It's very good of you. But after all, Pansy Osmond" —

"After all, Pansy Osmond is the most attractive person he has ever known!" Isabel exclaimed.

Madame Merle stared, and indeed she was justly bewildered. "Ah, a moment ago, I thought you seemed rather to disparage her."

"I said she was limited. And so she is. And so is Lord Warburton."

"So are we all, if you come to that. If it's no more than Pansy deserves, all the better. But if she fixes her affections on Mr. Rosier, I won't admit that she deserves it. That will be too perverse."

"Mr. Rosier's a nuisance!" cried Isabel, abruptly.

"I quite agree with you, and I am delighted to know that I am not expected to feed his flame. For the future, when he calls on me, my door shall be closed to him." And gathering her mantle together, Madame Merle prepared to depart. She was checked, however, on her progress to the door, by an inconsequent request from Isabel.

"All the same, you know, be kind to him."

She lifted her shoulders and eyebrows, and stood looking at her friend. "I don't understand your contradictions! Decidedly, I shall not be kind to him, for it will be a false kindness. I wish to see her married to Lord Warburton."

"You had better wait till he asks her."

"If what you say is true, he will ask her. Especially," said Madame Merle in a moment, "if you make him."

"If I make him?"

"It's quite in your power. You have great influence with him."

Isabel frowned a little. "Where did you learn that?"

"Mrs. Touchett told me. Not you, — never!" said Madame Merle, smiling.

"I certainly never told you that."

"You might have done so when we were by way of being confidential with each other. But you really told me very little; I have often thought so since."

Isabel had thought so too, sometimes with a certain satisfaction. But she did not admit it now, perhaps because she did not wish to appear to exult in it. "You seem to have had an excellent informant in my aunt," she simply said.

"She let me know that you had declined an offer of marriage from Lord Warburton, because she was greatly vexed, and was full of the subject. Of course I think you have done better in doing as you did. But if you would n't marry Lord Warburton yourself, make him the reparation of helping him to marry some one else."

Isabel listened to this with a countenance which persisted in not reflecting the bright expressiveness of Madame Merle's. But in a moment she said, reasonably and gently enough, "I should be very glad indeed if, as regards Pansy, it could be arranged." Upon which her companion, who seemed to regard this as a speech of good omen, embraced her more tenderly than might have been expected, and took her departure.

XL.

Osmond touched on this matter that evening for the first time, coming very late into the drawing-room, where she

was sitting alone. They had spent the evening at home, and Pansy had gone to bed; he himself had been sitting since dinner in a small apartment in which he had arranged his books and which he called his study. At ten o'clock Lord Warburton had come in, as he always did when he knew from Isabel that she was to be at home; he was going somewhere else, and he sat for half an hour. Isabel, after asking him for news of Ralph, said very little to him, on purpose; she wished him to talk with the young girl. She pretended to read; she even went after a little to the piano; she asked herself whether she might not leave the room. She had come little by little to think well of the idea of Pansy's becoming the wife of the master of beautiful Lockleigh, though at first it had not presented itself in a manner to excite her enthusiasm. Madame Merle, that afternoon, had applied the match to an accumulation of inflammable material. When Isabel was unhappy, she always looked about her — partly from impulse and partly by theory — for some form of exertion. She could never rid herself of the conviction that unhappiness was a state of disease; it was suffering as opposed to action. To act, to do something, — it hardly mattered what, — would therefore be an escape, perhaps in some degree a remedy. Besides, she wished to convince herself that she had done everything possible to content her husband; she was determined not to be haunted by images of a flat want of zeal. It would please him greatly to see Pansy married to an English nobleman, and justly please him, since this nobleman was such a fine fellow. It seemed to Isabel that if she could make it her duty to bring about such an event she should play the part of a good wife. She wanted to be that; she wanted to be able to believe, sincerely, that she had been that. Then, such an undertaking had other recommendations. It would

occupy her, and she desired occupation. It would even amuse her, and if she could really amuse herself she perhaps might be saved. Lastly, it would be a service to Lord Warburton, who evidently pleased himself greatly with the young girl. It was a little odd that he should, being what he was; but there was no accounting for such impressions. Pansy might captivate any one, — any one, at least, but Lord Warburton. Isabel would have thought her too small, too slight, perhaps even too artificial, for that. There was always a little of the doll about her, and that was not what Lord Warburton had been looking for. Still, who could say what men looked for? They looked for what they found; they knew what pleased them only when they saw it. No theory was valid in such matters, and nothing was more unaccountable or more natural than anything else. If he had cared for *her*, it might seem odd that he cared for Pansy, who was so different; but he had not cared for her so much as he supposed; or, if he had, he had completely got over it, and it was natural that, as that affair had failed, he should think that something of quite another sort might succeed. Enthusiasm, as I say, had not come at first to Isabel, but it came to-day, and made her feel almost happy. It was astonishing what happiness she could still find in the idea of procuring a pleasure for her husband. It was a pity, however, that Edward Rosier had crossed their path!

At this reflection the light that had suddenly gleamed upon that path lost something of its brightness. Isabel was unfortunately as sure that Pansy thought Mr. Rosier the nicest of all the young men, — as sure as if she had held an interview with her on the subject. It was very tiresome that she should be so sure, when she had carefully abstained from informing herself; almost as tiresome as that poor Mr. Rosier should have taken it into his own head.

He was certainly very inferior to Lord Warburton. It was not the difference in fortune so much as the difference in the men; the young American was really so very flimsy. He was much more of the type of the useless fine gentleman than the English nobleman. It was true that there was no particular reason why Pansy should marry a statesman; still, if a statesman admired her, that was his affair, and she would make a very picturesque little peeress.

It may seem to the reader that Isabel had suddenly grown strangely cynical; for she ended by saying to herself that this difficulty could probably be arranged. Somehow, an impediment that was embodied in poor Rosier could not present itself as a dangerous one; there were always means of leveling secondary obstacles. Isabel was perfectly aware that she had not taken the measure of Pansy's tenacity, which might prove to be inconveniently great; but she inclined to think the young girl would not be tenacious, for she had the faculty of assent developed in a very much higher degree than that of resistance. She would cling,—yes, she would cling; but it really mattered to her very little what she clung to. Lord Warburton would do as well as Mr. Rosier, especially as she seemed quite to like him. She had expressed this sentiment to Isabel without a single reservation; she said she thought his conversation most interesting,—he had told her all about India. His manner to Pansy had been of the happiest; Isabel noticed that for herself, as she also observed that he talked to her not in the least in a patronizing way, reminding himself of her youth and simplicity, but quite as if she could understand everything. He was careful only to be kind; he was as kind as he had been to Isabel herself at Gardencourt. A girl might well be touched by that; she remembered how she herself had been touched, and said to herself that if she had been as simple as

Pansy the impression would have been deeper still. She had not been simple when she refused him; that operation had been as complicated as, later, her acceptance of Osmond. Pansy, however, in spite of *her* simplicity, really did understand, and was glad that Lord Warburton should talk to her, not about her partners and bouquets, but about the state of Italy, the condition of the peasantry, the famous grist tax, the *pellagra*, his impressions of Roman society. She looked at him, as she drew her needle through her tapestry, with sweet, attentive eyes; and when she lowered them she gave little quiet oblique glances at his person, his hands, his feet, his clothes, as if she were considering him. Even his person, Isabel might have reminded her, was better than Mr. Rosier's. But Isabel contented herself at such moments with wondering where this gentleman was; he came no more at all to the Palazzo Roccanera. It was surprising, as I say, the hold it had taken of her,—the idea of assisting her husband to be pleased.

It was surprising for a variety of reasons, which I shall presently touch upon. On the evening I speak of, while Lord Warburton sat there, she had been on the point of taking the great step of going out of the room and leaving her companions alone. I say the great step, because it was in this light that Gilbert Osmond would have regarded it, and Isabel was trying as much as possible to take her husband's view. She succeeded after a fashion, but she did not succeed in coming to the point I mention. After all, she could n't; something held her, and made it impossible. It was not exactly that it would be base, insidious; for women as a general thing practice such manœuvres with a perfect good conscience, and Isabel had all the qualities of her sex. It was a vague doubt that interposed,—a sense that she was not quite sure. So she remained in the drawing-room, and after a while Lord

Warburton went off to his party, of which he promised to give Pansy a full account on the morrow. After he had gone, Isabel asked herself whether she had prevented something which would have happened if she had absented herself for a quarter of an hour; and then she exclaimed — always mentally — that when Lord Warburton wished her to go away he would easily find means to let her know it. Pansy said nothing whatever about him after he had gone, and Isabel said nothing, as she had taken a vow of reserve until after he should have declared himself. He was a little longer in coming to this than might seem to accord with the description he had given Isabel of his feelings. Pansy went to bed, and Isabel had to admit that she could not now guess what her step-daughter was thinking of. Her transparent little companion was for the moment rather opaque.

Isabel remained alone, looking at the fire, until, at the end of half an hour, her husband came in. He moved about a while in silence, and then sat down, looking at the fire, like herself. But Isabel now had transferred her eyes from the flickering flame in the chimney to Osmond's face, and she watched him while he sat silent. Covert observation had become a habit with her; an instinct, of which it is not an exaggeration to say that it was allied to that of self-defense, had made it habitual. She wished as much as possible to know his thoughts, — to know what he would say, beforehand, so that she might prepare her answer. Preparing answers had not been her strong point of old; she had rarely in this respect got further than thinking afterwards of clever things she might have said. But she had learned caution, — learned it in a measure from her husband's very countenance. It was the same face she had looked into with eyes equally earnest, perhaps, but less penetrating, on the terrace of a Florentine villa, except that Osmond had

grown a little stouter since his marriage. He still, however, looked very distinguished.

"Has Lord Warburton been here?" he presently asked.

"Yes; he stayed for half an hour."

"Did he see Pansy?"

"Yes; he sat on the sofa beside her."

"Did he talk with her much?"

"He talked almost only to her."

"It seems to me he's attentive. Isn't that what you call it?"

"I don't call it anything," said Isabel; "I have waited for you to give it a name."

"That's a consideration you don't always show," Osmond answered, after a moment.

"I have determined, this time, to try and act as you would like. I have so often failed in that."

Osmond turned his head slowly, looking at her.

"Are you trying to quarrel with me?"

"No, I am trying to live at peace."

"Nothing is more easy; you know I don't quarrel myself."

"What do you call it when you try to make me angry?" Isabel asked.

"I don't try; if I have done so, it has been the most naturally in the world. Moreover, I am not in the least trying now."

Isabel smiled. "It does n't matter. I have determined never to be angry again."

"That's an excellent resolve. Your temper is n't good."

"No, it's not good." She pushed away the book she had been reading, and took up the band of tapestry that Pansy had left on the table.

"That's partly why I have not spoken to you about this business of my daughter's," Osmond said, designating Pansy in the manner that was most frequent with him. "I was afraid I should encounter opposition, — that you too would

have views on the subject. I have sent little Rosier about his business."

"You were afraid that I would plead for Mr. Rosier? Have n't you noticed that I have never spoken to you of him?"

"I have never given you a chance. We have so little conversation in these days. I know he was an old friend of yours."

"Yes, he's an old friend of mine." Isabel cared little more for him than for the tapestry that she held in her hand; but it was true that he was an old friend, and with her husband she felt a desire not to extenuate such ties. He had a way of expressing contempt for them which fortified her loyalty to them, even when, as in the present case, they were in themselves insignificant. She sometimes felt a sort of passion of tenderness for memories which had no other merit than that they belonged to her unmarried life. "But as regards Pansy," she added in a moment, "I have given him no encouragement."

"That 's fortunate," Osmond observed.

"Fortunate for me, I suppose you mean. For him it matters little."

"There is no use talking of him," Osmond said. "As I tell you, I have turned him out."

"Yes; but a lover outside is always a lover. He is sometimes even more of one. Mr. Rosier still has hope."

"He's welcome to the comfort of it! My daughter has only to sit still, to become Lady Warburton."

"Should you like that?" Isabel asked, with a simplicity which was not so affected as it may appear. She was resolved to assume nothing, for Osmond had a way of unexpectedly turning her assumptions against her. The intensity with which he would like his daughter to become Lady Warburton had been the very basis of her own recent reflections. But that was for herself; she would recognize nothing until Osmond

should have put it into words; she would not take for granted with him that he thought Lord Warburton a prize worth an amount of effort that was unusual among the Osmonds. It was Gilbert's constant intimation that, for him, nothing was a prize; that he treated as from equal to equal with the most distinguished people in the world; and that his daughter had only to look about her to pick out a prince. It cost him, therefore, a lapse from consistency to say explicitly that he yearned for Lord Warburton, that if this nobleman should escape his equivalent might not be found; and it was another of his customary implications that he was never inconsistent. He would have liked his wife to glide over the point. But strangely enough, now that she was face to face with him, though an hour before she had almost invented a scheme for pleasing him, Isabel was not accommodating, would not glide. And yet she knew exactly the effect on his mind of her question: it would operate as a humiliation. Never mind; he was terribly capable of humiliating her, — all the more so that he was also capable of waiting for great opportunities, and of showing, sometimes, an almost unaccountable indifference to small ones. Isabel perhaps took a small opportunity because she would not have availed herself of a great one.

Osmond at present acquitted himself very honorably. "I should like it extremely; it would be a great marriage. And then Lord Warburton has another advantage: he is an old friend of yours. It would be pleasant for him to come into the family. It is very singular that Pansy's admirers should all be your old friends."

"It is natural that they should come to see me. In coming to see me, they see Pansy. Seeing her, it is natural that they should fall in love with her."

"So I think. But you are not bound to do so."

"If she should marry Lord Warbur-

ton, I should be very glad," Isabel went on, frankly. "He's an excellent man. You say, however, that she has only to sit still. Perhaps she won't sit still; if she loses Mr. Rosier, she may jump up!"

Osmond appeared to give no heed to this; he sat gazing at the fire. "Pansy would like to be a great lady," he remarked in a moment, with a certain tenderness of tone. "She wishes, above all, to please," he added.

"To please Mr. Rosier, perhaps."

"No, to please me."

"Me too, a little, I think," said Isabel.

"Yes, she has a great opinion of you. But she will do what I like."

"If you are sure of that, it's very well," Isabel said.

"Meantime," said Osmond, "I should like our distinguished visitor to speak."

"He has spoken, — to me. He has told me that it would be a great pleasure to him to believe she could care for him."

Osmond turned his head quickly; but at first he said nothing. Then, "Why didn't you tell me that?" he asked, quickly.

"There was no opportunity. You know how we live. I have taken the first chance that has offered."

"Did you speak to him of Rosier?"

"Oh, yes, a little."

"That was hardly necessary."

"I thought it best he should know, so that, so that" — And Isabel paused.

"So that what?"

"So that he should act accordingly."

"So that he should back out, do you mean?"

"No; so that he should advance while there is yet time."

"That is not the effect it seems to have had."

"You should have patience," said Isabel. "You know Englishmen are shy."

"This one is not. He was not when he made love to you."

She had been afraid Osmond would speak of that; it was disagreeable to her. "I beg your pardon; he was extremely so," she said, simply.

He answered nothing for some time; he took up a book and turned over the pages, while Isabel sat silent, occupying herself with Pansy's tapestry. "You must have a great deal of influence with him," Osmond went on, at last. "The moment you really wish it, you can bring him to the point."

This was more disagreeable still; but Isabel felt it to be natural that her husband should say it, and it was after all something very much of the same sort that she had said to herself. "Why should I have influence?" she asked. "What have I ever done to put him under an obligation to me?"

"You refused to marry him," said Osmond, with his eyes on his book.

"I mustn't presume too much on that," Isabel answered, gently.

He threw down the book presently, and got up, standing before the fire with his hands behind him. "Well," he said, "I hold that it lies in your hands. I shall leave it there. With a little good will you may manage it. Think that over, and remember that I count upon you."

He waited a little, to give her time to answer; but she answered nothing, and he presently strolled out of the room.

XLI.

She answered nothing, because his words had put the situation before her, and she was absorbed in looking at it. There was something in them that suddenly opened the door to agitation, so that she was afraid to trust herself to speak. After Osmond had gone, she leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes; and for a long time, far into the night, and still further, she sat in the silent drawing-room, given up to her

meditation. A servant came in to attend to the fire, and she bade him bring fresh candles and then go to bed. Osmond had told her to think of what he had said; and she did so indeed, and of many other things. The suggestion, from another, that she had a peculiar influence on Lord Warburton had given her the start that accompanies unexpected recognition. Was it true that there was something still between them that might be a handle to make him declare himself to Pansy,—a susceptibility, on his part, to approval, a desire to do what would please her? Isabel had hitherto not asked herself the question, because she had not been forced; but now that it was directly presented to her, she saw the answer, and the answer frightened her. Yes, there was something,—something on Lord Warburton's part. When he first came to Rome she believed that the link which united them had completely snapped; but little by little she had been reminded that it still had a palpable existence. It was as thin as a hair, but there were moments when she seemed to hear it vibrate. For herself, nothing was changed; what she once thought of Lord Warburton she still thought. It was needless that feeling should change; on the contrary, it seemed to her a better feeling than ever. But he,—had he still the idea that she might be more to him than other women? Had he the wish to profit by the memory of the few moments of intimacy through which they had once passed? Isabel knew that she had read some of the signs of such a disposition. But what were his hopes, his pretensions, and in what strange way were they mingled with his evidently very sincere appreciation of poor Pansy? Was he in love with Gilbert Osmond's wife, and if so what comfort did he expect to derive from it? If he was in love with Pansy, he was not in love with her step-mother; and if he was in love with her step-mother, he was not in love with Pansy.

Was she to cultivate the advantage she possessed, in order to make him commit himself to Pansy, knowing that he would do so for her sake, and not for the young girl's,—was this the service her husband had asked of her? This, at any rate, was the duty with which Isabel found herself confronted from the moment that she admitted to herself that Lord Warburton had still an uneradicated predilection for her society. It was not an agreeable task; it was, in fact, a repulsive one. She asked herself with dismay whether Lord Warburton was pretending to be in love with Pansy in order to cultivate another satisfaction? Of this refinement of duplicity she presently acquitted him; she preferred to believe that he was in good faith. But if his admiration for Pansy was a delusion, this was scarcely better than its being an affectation. Isabel wandered among these ugly possibilities until she completely lost her way; some of them, as she suddenly encountered them, seemed ugly enough. Then she broke out of the labyrinth, rubbing her eyes, and declared that her imagination surely did her little honor, and that her husband's did him even less. Lord Warburton was as disinterested as he need be, and she was no more to him than she need wish. She would rest upon this until the contrary should be proved,—proved more effectually than by a cynical intimation of Osmond's.

Such a resolution, however, brought her this evening but little peace, for her soul was haunted with terrors which crowded to the foreground of thought as quickly as a place was made for them. What had suddenly set them into livelier motion she hardly knew, unless it were the strange impression she had received in the afternoon of her husband and Madame Merle being in more direct communication than she suspected. This impression came back to her from time to time, and now she wondered that it had never come before. Besides this,

her short interview with Osmond, half an hour before, was a striking example of his faculty for making everything wither that he touched, spoiling everything for her that he looked at. It was very well to undertake to give him a proof of loyalty; the real fact was that the knowledge of his expecting a thing raised a presumption against it. It was as if he had had the evil eye; as if his presence were a blight and his favor a misfortune. Was the fault in himself, or only in the deep mistrust she had conceived for him? This mistrust was the clearest result of their short married life; a gulf had opened between them, over which they looked at each other with eyes that were on either side a declaration of the deception suffered. It was a strange opposition, of the like of which she had never dreamed, an opposition in which the vital principle of the one was a thing of contempt to the other. It was not her fault, — she had practiced no deception; she had only admired and believed. She had taken all the first steps in the purest confidence, and then she had suddenly found the infinite vista of a multiplied life to be a dark, narrow alley, with a dead wall at the end. Instead of leading to the high places of happiness, from which the world would seem to lie below one, so that one could look down with a sense of exaltation and advantage, and judge and choose and pity, it led rather downward and earthward, into realms of restriction and depression, where the sound of other lives, easier and freer, was heard as from above, and served to deepen the feeling of failure. It was her deep distrust of her husband, — this was what darkened the world. That is a sentiment easily indicated, but not so easily explained, and so composite in its character that much time and still more suffering had been needed to bring it to its actual perfection. Suffering, with Isabel, was an active condition; it was not a chill, a stupor, a despair; it was

a passion of thought, of speculation, of response to every pressure. She flattered herself, however, that she had kept her mistrust to herself, — that no one suspected it but Osmond. Oh, he knew it, and there were times when she thought that he enjoyed it. It had come gradually; it was not till the first year of her marriage had closed that she had taken the alarm. Then the shadows began to gather; it was as if Osmond deliberately, almost malignantly, had put the lights out one by one. The dusk at first was vague and thin, and she could still see her way in it. But it steadily increased, and if here and there it had occasionally lifted there were certain corners of her life that were impenetrably black. These shadows were not an emanation from her own mind, — she was very sure of that; she had done her best to be just and temperate, to see only the truth. They were a part of her husband's very presence. They were not his misdeeds, his turpitudes; she accused him of nothing, — that is, of but one thing, which was not a crime. She knew of no wrong that he had done; he was not violent, he was not cruel; she simply believed that he hated her. That was all she accused him of; and the miserable part of it was precisely that it was not a crime, for against a crime she might have found redress. He had discovered that she was so different; that she was not what he had believed she would prove to be. He had thought at first he could change her, and she had done her best to be what he would like. But she was, after all, herself, — she could not help that; and now there was no use pretending, playing a part, for he knew her, and he had made up his mind. She was not afraid of him; she had no apprehension that he would hurt her, for the ill-will he bore her was not of that sort. He would, if possible, never give her a pretext, never put himself in the wrong. Isabel, scanning the future with

dry, fixed eyes, saw that he would have the better of her there. She would give him many pretexts; she would often put herself in the wrong. There were times when she almost pitied him; for if she had not deceived him in intention, she understood how completely she must have done so in fact. She had effaced herself, when he first knew her; she had made herself small, pretending there was less of her than there really was. It was because she had been under the extraordinary charm that he, on his side, had taken pains to put forth. He was not changed; he had not disguised himself, during the year of his courtship, any more than she. But she had seen only half his nature then, as one saw the disk of the moon when it was partly masked by the shadow of the earth. She saw the full moon now, — she saw the whole man. She had kept still, as it were, so that he should have a free field, and yet in spite of this she had mistaken a part for the whole.

Ah, she had him immensely under the charm! It had not passed away; it was there still; she still knew perfectly what it was that made Osmond delightful when he chose to be. He had wished to be when he made love to her, and as she had wished to be charmed it was not wonderful that he succeeded. He succeeded because he was sincere; it never occurred to her to deny him that. He admired her, — he had told her why: because she was the most imaginative woman he had known. It might very well have been true; for during those months she had imagined a world of things that had no substance. She had a vision of him; she had not read him right. A certain combination of features had touched her, and in them she had seen the most striking of portraits. That he was poor and lonely, and yet that somehow he was noble, — that was what interested her and seemed to give her her opportunity. There was an indefinable beauty about him, — in his sit-

uation, in his mind, in his face. She had felt at the same time that he was helpless and ineffectual, but the feeling had taken the form of a tenderness, which was the very flower of respect. He was like a skeptical voyager, strolling on the beach while he waited for the tide; looking seaward, yet not putting to sea. It was in all this that she found her occasion. She would launch his boat for him; she would be his providence; it would be a good thing to love him. And she loved him, — a good deal for what she found in him, but a good deal, also, for what she brought him. As she looked back at the passion of those weeks, she perceived in it a kind of maternal strain, — the happiness of a woman who felt that she was a contributor, that she came with full hands. But for her money, as she saw to-day, she would n't have done it. And then her mind wandered off to poor Mr. Touchett, sleeping under English turf, the beneficent author of infinite woe! For this was a fact. At bottom, her money had been a burden, — had been on her mind, which was filled with the desire to transfer the weight of it to some other conscience. What would lighten her own conscience more effectually than to make it over to the man who had the best taste in the world? Unless she should give it to a hospital, there was nothing better she could do with it; and there was no charitable institution in which she was as much interested as in Gilbert Osmond. He would use her fortune in a way that would make her think better of it, and rub off a certain grossness which attached to the good luck of an unexpected inheritance. There had been nothing very delicate in inheriting seventy thousand pounds; the delicacy had been all in Mr. Touchett's leaving them to her. But to marry Gilbert Osmond and bring him such a portion, — in that there would be delicacy for her as well. There would be less for him, — that was true; but that was

his affair, and if he loved her he would not object to her being rich. Had he not had the courage to say he was glad she was rich?

Isabel's cheek tingled when she asked herself if she had really married on a factitious theory, in order to do something finely appreciable with her money. But she was able to answer quickly enough that this was only half the story. It was because a certain feeling took possession of her, — a sense of the earnestness of his affection and a delight in his personal qualities. He was better than any one else. This supreme conviction had filled her life for months, and enough of it still remained to prove to her that she could not have done otherwise. The finest individual she had ever known was hers; the simple knowledge was a sort of act of devotion. She had not been mistaken about the beauty of his mind; she knew that organ perfectly now. She had lived with it, she had lived in it, almost; it appeared to have become her habitation. If she had been captured, it had taken a firm hand to do it; that reflection, perhaps, had some worth. A mind more ingenious, more subtle, more cultivated, more trained to admirable exercises, she had not encountered; and it was this exquisite instrument that she had now to reckon with. She lost herself in infinite dismay when she thought of the magnitude of *his* deception. It was a wonder, perhaps, in view of this, that he did not hate her more. She remembered perfectly the first sign he had given of it; it had been like the bell that was to ring up the curtain upon the real drama of their life. He said to her one day that she had too many ideas, and that she must get rid of them. He had told her that already, before their marriage; but then she had not noticed it; it came back to her only afterwards. This time she might well notice it, because he had really meant it. The words were nothing, superficially; but when, in the light of

deepening experience, she looked into them, they appeared portentous. He really meant it; he would have liked her to have nothing of her own but her pretty appearance. She knew she had too many ideas; she had more even than she supposed, many more than she had expressed to him when he asked her to marry him. Yes, she *had* been hypocritical; she liked him so much. She had too many ideas for herself; but that was just what one married for, to share them with some one else. One could not pluck them up by the roots, though of course one might suppress them, be careful not to utter them. It was not that, however, — his objecting to her opinions; that was nothing. She had no opinions, none that she would not have been eager to sacrifice in the satisfaction of feeling herself loved for it. What he meant was the whole thing, — her character, the way she felt, the way she judged. This was what she had kept in reserve; this was what he had not known until he found himself, with the door closed behind, as it were, set down face to face with it. She had a certain way of looking at life, which he took as a personal offense. Heaven knew that now, at least, it was a very humble, accommodating way! The strange thing was that she should not have suspected from the first that his own was so different. She had thought it so large, so enlightened, so perfectly that of an honest man, and a gentleman. Had not he assured her that he had no superstitions, no dull limitations, no prejudices that had lost their freshness? Had not he all the appearance of a man living in the open air of the world, indifferent to small considerations, caring only for truth and knowledge, and believing that two intelligent people ought to look for them together, and whether they found them or not to find at least some happiness in the search? He had told her that he loved the conventional; but there was a sense in which this seemed a noble declaration.

In that sense, the love of harmony and order and decency and all the stately offices of life, she went with him freely, and his warning had contained nothing ominous. But when, as the months elapsed, she followed him further, and he led her into the mansion of his own habitation, then,—then she had seen where she really was. She could live it over again, the incredulous terror with which she had taken the measure of her dwelling. Between those four walls she had lived ever since; they were to surround her for the rest of her life. It was the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation. Osmond's beautiful mind gave it neither light nor air; Osmond's beautiful mind, indeed, seemed to peep down from a small high window, and mock at her. Of course, it was not physical suffering; but for physical suffering there might have been a remedy. She could come and go; she had her liberty; her husband was perfectly polite. He took himself so seriously; it was something appalling. Under all his culture, his cleverness, his amenity, under his good-nature, his facility, his knowledge of life, his egotism lay hidden, like a serpent in a bank of flowers. She had taken him seriously, but she had not taken him so seriously as that. How could she, especially when she knew him better? She was to think of him as he thought of himself,—as the first gentleman in Europe. So it was that she had thought of him at first, and that, indeed, was the reason she had married him. But when she began to see what it implied, she drew back; there was more in the bond than she had meant to put her name to. It implied a sovereign contempt for every one but some three or four very exalted people whom he envied, and for everything in the world but half a dozen ideas of his own. That was very well; she would have gone with him even there, a long distance; for he pointed out to her so much of the baseness and shabbiness of life, opened

her eyes so wide to the stupidity, the depravity, the ignorance, of mankind, that she had been properly impressed with the infinite vulgarity of things, and of the virtue of keeping one's self unspotted by it. But this base, ignoble world, it appeared, was after all what one was to live for; one was to keep it forever in one's eye, in order, not to enlighten, or convert, or redeem it, but to extract from it some recognition of one's own superiority. On the one hand it was despicable, but on the other it afforded a standard. Osmond had talked to Isabel about his renunciation, his indifference, the ease with which he dispensed with the usual aids to success; and all this had seemed to her admirable. She had thought it a noble indifference, an exquisite independence. But indifference was really the last of his qualities; she had never seen any one who thought so much of others. For herself, the world had always interested her, and the study of her fellow-creatures was her constant passion. She would have been willing, however, to renounce all her curiosities and sympathies for the sake of a personal life, if the person concerned had only been able to make her believe it was a gain! This, at least, was her present conviction; and the thing certainly would have been easier than to care for society as Osmond cared for it.

He was unable to live without it, and she saw that he had never really done so; he had looked at it out of his window, even when he appeared to be most detached from it. He had his ideal, just as she had tried to have hers; only it was strange that people should seek for justice in such different quarters. His ideal was a conception of high prosperity and propriety, of the aristocratic life, which she now saw that Osmond deemed himself always, in essence at least, to have led. He had never lapsed from it for an hour; he would never have recovered from the shame of doing so.

That, again, was very well; here, too, she would have agreed; but they attached such different ideas, such different associations and desires, to the same formulas. Her notion of the aristocratic life was simply the union of great culture with great liberty; the culture would give one a sense of duty, and the liberty a sense of enjoyment. But for Osmond it was altogether a thing of forms, a conscious, calculated attitude. He was fond of the old, the consecrated, and transmitted; so was she, but she pretended to do what she chose with it. He had an immense esteem for tradition; he had told her once that the best thing in the world was to have it, but that if one was so unfortunate as not to have it one must immediately proceed to make it. She knew that he meant by this that she had n't it, but that he was better off; though where he had got his traditions she never learned. He had a very large collection of them, however, that was very certain; after a little she began to see. The great thing was to act in accordance with them,—the great thing not only for him but for her. Isabel had an undefined conviction that traditions must be of a thoroughly superior kind, to serve for another person than their proprietor; but she nevertheless assented to this intimation that she too must march to the stately music that floated down from unknown periods in her husband's past,—she, who of old had been so free of step, so desultory, so devious, so much the reverse of processional. There were certain things they must do, a certain posture they must take, certain people they must know and not know. When Isabel saw this rigid system closing about her, draped though it was in pictured tapestries, that sense of darkness and suffocation of which I have spoken took possession of her; she seemed to be shut up with an odor of mould and decay. She had resisted, of course: at first very humorously, ironically, tenderly; then, as the situation grew more serious, eagerly,

passionately, pleadingly. She had pleaded the cause of freedom, of doing as they chose, of not caring for the aspect and denomination of their life,—the cause of other instincts and longings, of quite another ideal. Then it was that her husband's personality, touched as it never had been, stepped forth and stood erect. The things that she had said were answered only by his scorn, and she could see that he was ineffably ashamed of her. What did he think of her? That she was base, vulgar, ignoble? He at least knew now that she had no traditions! It had not been in his prevision of things that she should reveal such flatness; her sentiments were worthy of a radical newspaper, or of a Unitarian preacher. The real offense, as she ultimately perceived, was her having a mind of her own at all. Her mind was to be his,—attached to his own like a small garden plot to a deer-park. He would rake the soil gently, and water the flowers; he would weed the beds and gather an occasional nosegay. It would be a pretty piece of property for a proprietor already far-reaching. He did n't wish her to be stupid. On the contrary, it was because she was clever that she had pleased him. But he expected her intelligence to operate altogether in his favor, and so far from desiring her mind to be a blank he had flattered himself that it would be richly receptive. He had expected his wife to feel with him and for him, to enter into his opinions, his ambitions, his preferences; and Isabel was obliged to confess that this was no very unwarrantable demand on the part of a husband. But there were certain things she could never take in. To begin with, they were hideously unclean. She was not a daughter of the Puritans, but for all that she believed in such a thing as purity. It would appear that Osmond did n't; some of his traditions made her push back her skirts. Did all women have lovers? Did they all lie, and even the best have their

price? Were there only three or four that did n't deceive their husbands? When Isabel heard such things, she felt a greater scorn for them than for the gossip of a village parlor, — a scorn that kept its freshness in a very tainted air. There was the taint of her sister-in-law; did her husband judge only by the Countess Gemini? This lady very often lied, and she had practiced deceptions which were not simply verbal. It was enough to find these facts assumed among Osmond's traditions, without giving them such a general extension. It was her scorn of his assumptions, — it was that that made him draw himself up. He had plenty of contempt, and it was proper that his wife should be as well furnished; but that she should turn the hot light of her disdain upon his own conception of things, — this was a danger he had not allowed for. He believed he should have regulated her emotions before she came to that; and Isabel could easily imagine how his ears scorched when he discovered that he had been too confident. When one had a wife who gave one that sensation, there was nothing left but to hate her!

She was morally certain, now, that this feeling of hatred, which at first had been a refuge and a refreshment, had become the occupation and comfort of Osmond's life. The feeling was deep, because it was sincere; he had had a revelation that, after all, she could dispense with him. If to herself the idea was startling, if it presented itself at first as a kind of infidelity, a capacity for pollution, what infinite effect might it not be expected to have had upon him? It was very simple, — he despised her; she had no traditions and the moral horizon of a Unitarian minister. Poor Isabel, who had never been able to understand Unitarianism! This was the conviction that she had been living with now for a time that she had ceased to measure. What was coming, what was before them? That was her constant

question. What would he do, what ought she do? When a man hated his wife, what did it lead to? She did n't hate him, that she was sure of, for every little while she felt a passionate wish to give him a pleasant surprise. Very often, however, she felt afraid, and it used to come over her, as I have intimated, that she had deceived him at the very first. They were strangely married, at all events, and it was an awful life. Until that morning he had scarcely spoken to her for a week; his manner was as dry as a burned-out fire. She knew there was a special reason: he was displeased at Ralph Touchett's staying on in Rome. He thought she saw too much of her cousin; he had told her a week before that it was indecent she should go to him at his hotel. He would have said more than this if Ralph's invalid state had not appeared to make it brutal to denounce him; but having to contain himself only deepened Osmond's disgust. Isabel read all this as she would have read the hour on the clock-face; she was as perfectly aware that the sight of her interest in her cousin stirred her husband's rage as if Osmond had locked her into her bedroom, — which she was sure he wanted to do. It was her honest belief that on the whole she was not defiant, but she certainly could not pretend to be indifferent to Ralph. She believed he was dying, at last, and that she should never see him again, and this gave her a tenderness for him that she had never known before. Nothing was a pleasure to her now; how could anything be a pleasure to a woman who knew that she had thrown away her life? There was an everlasting weight upon her heart; there was a livid light upon everything. But Ralph's little visit was a lamp in the darkness; for the hour that she sat with him her spirit rose. She felt today as if he had been her brother. She had never had a brother, but if she had, and she were in trouble, and he were dying, he would be dear to her as Ralph

was. Ah, yes, if Gilbert was jealous of her, there was perhaps some reason; it did n't make Gilbert look better to sit for half an hour with Ralph. It was not that they talked of him; it was not that she complained. His name was never uttered between them. It was simply that Ralph was generous, and that her husband was not. There was something in Ralph's talk, in his smile, in the mere fact of his being in Rome, that made the blasted circle round which she walked more spacious. He made her feel the good of the world; he made her feel what might have been. He was, after all, as intelligent as Osmond, quite apart from his being better. And thus it seemed to her an act of devotion to conceal her misery from him. She concealed it elaborately; in their talk she was perpetually hanging out curtains and arranging screens. It lived before her again, — it had never had time to die, — that morning in the garden at Florence, when he warned her against Osmond. She had only to close her eyes to see the place, to hear his voice, to feel the warm, sweet air. How could he have known? What a mystery, what a wonder of wisdom! As intelligent as Gilbert! He was much more intelligent, to arrive at such a judgment as that. Gilbert had never been so deep, so just. She had told him then that from her at least he should never know if he were right; and this was what she was taking care of now. It gave her plenty to do; there was passion, exaltation, religion, in it. Women find their religion sometimes in strange exercises, and Isabel, at present, in playing a part before her cousin, had an idea that she was doing him a kindness. It would have been a kindness, perhaps, if he had been for a single instant a dupe. As it was, the kindness consisted mainly in trying to make him believe that he had once wounded her greatly, and that the event had put him to shame; but that, as she was very generous and he was so ill,

she bore him no grudge, and even considerately forbore to flaunt her happiness in his face. Ralph smiled to himself, as he lay on his sofa, at this extraordinary form of consideration; but he forgave her for having forgiven him. She did n't wish him to have the pain of knowing she was unhappy; that was the great thing, and it did n't matter that such knowledge would rather have righted him.

For herself, she lingered in the soundless drawing-room long after the fire had gone out. There was no danger of her feeling the cold; she was in a fever. She heard the small hours strike, and then the great ones, but her vigil took no heed of time. Her mind, assailed by visions, was in a state of extraordinary activity, and her visions might as well come to her there, where she sat up to meet them, as on her pillow to make a mockery of rest. As I have said, she believed she was not defiant, and what could be a better proof of it than that she should linger there half the night, trying to persuade herself that there was no reason why Pansy should n't be married as you would put a letter in the post-office? When the clock struck four she got up; she was going to bed at last, for the lamp had long since gone out, and the candles had burned down to their sockets. But even then she stopped again in the middle of the room, and stood there gazing at a remembered vision, — that of her husband and Madame Merle grouped unconsciously and familiarly.

XLII.

Three nights after this she took Pansy to a great party, to which Osmond, who never went to dances, did not accompany them. Pansy was as ready for a dance as ever; she was not of a generalizing turn, and she had not extended to other pleasures the interdict that she had seen placed on those of

love. If she was biding her time or hoping to circumvent her father, she must have had a prevision of success. Isabel thought that this was not likely; it was much more likely that Pansy had simply determined to be a good girl. She had never had such a chance, and she had a proper esteem for chances. She carried herself no less attentively than usual, and kept no less anxious an eye upon her vaporous skirts; she held her bouquet very tight, and counted over the flowers for the twentieth time. She made Isabel feel old; it seemed so long since she had been in a flutter about a ball. Pansy, who was greatly admired, was never in want of partners, and very soon after their arrival she gave Isabel, who was not dancing, her bouquet to hold. Isabel had rendered this service for some minutes when she became aware that Edward Rosier was standing before her. He had lost his affable smile, and wore a look of almost military resolution. The change in his appearance would have made Isabel smile, if she had not felt that at bottom his case was a hard one; he had always smelt so much more of heliotrope than of gunpowder. He looked at her a moment somewhat fiercely, as if to notify her that he was dangerous, and then he dropped his eyes on her bouquet. After he had inspected it his glance softened, and he said quickly, —

“It’s all pansies; it must be hers!”

Isabel smiled kindly. “Yes, it’s hers; she gave it to me to hold.”

“May I hold it a little, Mrs. Osmond?” the poor young man asked.

“No, I can’t trust you; I am afraid you would n’t give it back.”

“I am not sure that I should; I should leave the house with it instantly. But may I not at least have a single flower?”

Isabel hesitated a moment, and then, smiling still, held out the bouquet.

“Choose one yourself. It’s frightful what I am doing for you.”

“Ah, if you do no more than this, Mrs. Osmond!” Rosier exclaimed, with his glass in one eye, carefully choosing his flower.

“Don’t put it into your button-hole,” she said. “Don’t, for the world!”

“I should like her to see it. She has refused to dance with me, but I wish to show her that I believe in her still.”

“It’s very well to show it to her, but it’s out of place to show it to others. Her father has told her not to dance with you.”

“And is that all *you* can do for me? I expected more from you, Mrs. Osmond,” said the young man, in a tone of fine general reference. “You know that our acquaintance goes back very far, quite into the days of our innocent childhood.”

“Don’t make me out too old,” Isabel answered, smiling. “You come back to that very often, and I have never denied it. But I must tell you that, old friends as we are, if you had done me the honor to ask me to marry you I should have refused you.”

“Ah, you don’t esteem me, then. Say at once that you think I’m a trifier!”

“I esteem you very much, but I’m not in love with you. What I mean by that, of course, is that I am not in love with you for Pansy.”

“Very good, I see; you pity me, that’s all.”

And Edward Rosier looked all round, inconsequently, with his single glass. It was a revelation to him that people should n’t be more pleased; but he was at least too proud to show that the movement struck him as general.

Isabel for a moment said nothing. His manner and appearance had not the dignity of the deepest tragedy; his little glass, among other things, was against that. But she suddenly felt touched; her own unhappiness, after all, had something in common with his, and it came over her, more than before, that

here, in recognizable form, if not in romantic cast, was the most affecting thing in the world, — young love struggling with adversity.

“Would you really be very kind to her?” she said in a low tone.

He dropped his eyes, devoutly, and raised the little flower which he held in his fingers to his lips. Then he looked at her. “You pity me; but don’t you pity her a little?”

“I don’t know; I am not sure. She will always enjoy life.”

“It will depend on what you call life!” Rosier exclaimed. “She won’t enjoy being tortured.”

“There will be nothing of that.”

“I am glad to hear it. She knows what she is about. You will see.”

“I think she does, and she will never disobey her father. But she is coming back to me,” Isabel added, “and I must beg you to go away.”

Rosier lingered a moment, till Pansy came in sight, on the arm of her cavalier; he stood just long enough to look her in the face. Then he walked away, holding up his head; and the manner in which he achieved this sacrifice to expediency convinced Isabel that he was very much in love.

Pansy, who seldom got disarranged in dancing, and looked perfectly fresh and cool after this exercise, waited a moment, and then took back her bouquet. Isabel watched her, and saw that she was counting the flowers; whereupon she said to herself that, decidedly, there were deeper forces at play than she had recognized. Pansy had seen Rosier turn away, but she said nothing to Isabel about him: she talked only of her partner, after he had made his bow and retired; of the music, the floor, the rare misfortune of having already torn her dress. Isabel was sure, however, that she perceived that her lover had abstracted a flower; though this knowledge was not needed to account for the dutiful grace with which she responded to

the appeal of her next partner. That perfect amenity under acute constraint was part of a larger system. She was again led forth by a flushed young man, this time carrying her bouquet; and she had not been absent many minutes when Isabel saw Lord Warburton advancing through the crowd. He presently drew near, and bade her good-evening; she had not seen him since the day before. He looked about him, and then, “Where is the little maid?” he asked. It was in this manner that he formed the harmless habit of alluding to Miss Osmond.

“She is dancing,” said Isabel; “you will see her somewhere.”

He looked among the dancers, and at last caught Pansy’s eye. “She sees me, but she won’t notice me,” he then remarked. “Are you not dancing?”

“As you see, I’m a wall-flower.”

“Won’t you dance with me?”

“Thank you; I would rather you should dance with my little maid.”

“One need n’t prevent the other; especially as she is engaged.”

“She is not engaged for everything, and you can reserve yourself. She dances very hard, and you will be the fresher.”

“She dances beautifully,” said Lord Warburton, following her with his eyes. “Ah, at last,” he added, “she has given me a smile.” He stood there with his handsome, easy, important physiognomy; and as Isabel observed him it came over her, as it had done before, that it was strange a man of his importance should take an interest in a little maid. It struck her as a great incongruity; neither Pansy’s small fascinations, nor his own kindness, his good-nature, not even his need for amusement, which was extreme and constant, were sufficient to account for it. “I shall like to dance with you,” he went on in a moment, turning back to Isabel; “but I think I like even better to talk with you.”

“Yes, it’s better, and it’s more

worthy of your dignity. Great statesmen ought n't to waltz."

"Don't be cruel. Why did you recommend me, then, to dance with Miss Osmond?"

"Ah, that's different. If you dance with her, it would look simply like a piece of kindness, — as if you were doing it for her amusement. If you dance with me you would look as if you were doing it for your own."

"And pray, haven't I a right to amuse myself?"

"No, not with the affairs of the British Empire on your hands."

"The British Empire be hanged! You are always laughing at it."

"Amuse yourself with talking to me," said Isabel.

"I am not sure that is a recreation. You are too pointed; I have always to be defending myself. And you strike me as more than usually dangerous to-night. Won't you really dance?"

"I can't leave my place. Pansy must find me here."

He was silent a moment. "You are wonderfully good to her," he said suddenly.

Isabel stared a little, and smiled. "Can you imagine one's not being?"

"No, indeed. I know how I feel myself. But you must have done a great deal for her."

"I have taken her out with me," said Isabel, smiling still. "And I have seen that she has proper clothes."

"Your society must have been a great benefit to her. You have talked to her, advised her, helped her to develop."

"Ah, yes, if she isn't the rose, she has lived near it."

Isabel laughed, and her companion smiled; but there was a certain visible preoccupation in his face which interfered with complete hilarity. "We all try to live as near it as we can," he said, after a moment's hesitation.

Isabel turned away; Pansy was about to be restored to her, and she

welcomed the diversion. We know how much she liked Lord Warburton; she thought him delightful. There was something in his friendship which appeared a kind of resource in case of indefinite need; it was like having a large balance at the bank. She felt happier when he was in the room; there was something reassuring in his approach; the sound of his voice reminded her of the beneficence of nature. Yet for all that it did not please her that he should be too near to her, that he should take too much of her good-will for granted. She was afraid of that; she averted herself from it; she wished he would n't. She felt that if he should come too near, as it were, it was in her to flash out and bid him keep his distance. Pansy came back to Isabel with another rent in her skirt, which was the inevitable consequence of the first, and which she displayed to Isabel with serious eyes. There were too many gentlemen in uniform; they wore those dreadful spurs, which were fatal to the dresses of young girls. It hereupon became apparent that the resources of women are innumerable. Isabel devoted herself to Pansy's desecrated drapery; she fumbled for a pin and repaired the injury; she smiled and listened to her account of her adventures. Her attention, her sympathy, were most active; and they were in direct proportion to a sentiment with which they were in no way connected, a lively conjecture as to whether Lord Warburton was trying to make love to her. It was not simply his words just then; it was others as well; it was the reference and the continuity. This was what she thought about while she pinned up Pansy's dress. If it were so, as she feared, he was of course unconscious; he himself had not taken account of his intention. But this made it none the more auspicious, made the situation none the less unacceptable. The sooner Lord Warburton should come to self-consciousness the better.

He immediately began to talk to Pansy, on whom it was certainly mystifying to see that he dropped a smile of chastened devotion. Pansy replied as usual, with a little air of conscientious aspiration; he had to bend toward her a good deal in conversation, and her eyes, as usual, wandered up and down his robust person, as if he had offered it to her for exhibition. She always seemed a little frightened; yet her fright was not of the painful character that suggests dislike; on the contrary, she looked as if she knew that he knew that she liked him. Isabel left them together a little, and wandered toward a friend whom she saw near, and with whom she talked, till the music of the following dance began, for which she knew that Pansy was also engaged. The young girl joined her presently, with a little fluttered look, and Isabel, who scrupulously took Osmond's view of his daughter's complete dependence, consigned her, as a precious and momentary loan, to her appointed partner. About all this matter she had her own imaginations, her own reserves; there were moments when Pansy's extreme adhesiveness made each of them, to her sense, look foolish. But Osmond had given her a sort of tableau of her position as his daughter's duenna, which consisted of gracious alternation of concession and contraction; and there were directions of his which she liked to think that she obeyed to the letter. Perhaps, as regards some of them, it was because her doing so appeared to reduce them to the absurd.

After Pansy had been led away, Isabel found Lord Warburton drawing near her again. She rested her eyes on him, steadily; she wished she could sound his thoughts. But he had no appearance of confusion.

"She has promised to dance with me later," he said.

"I am glad of that. I suppose you have engaged her for the cotillon."

At this he looked a little awkward.

"No, I did n't ask her for that. It's a quadrille."

"Ah, you are not clever!" said Isabel, almost angrily. "I told her to keep the cotillon, in case you should ask for it."

"Poor little maid, fancy that!" And Lord Warburton laughed frankly. "Of course I will, if you like."

"If I like? Oh, if you dance with her only because I like it!"

"I am afraid I bore her. She seems to have a lot of young fellows on her book."

Isabel dropped her eyes, reflecting rapidly; Lord Warburton stood there looking at her, and she felt his eyes on her face. She felt much inclined to ask him to remove them. She did not do so, however; she only said to him, after a minute, looking up, "Please to let me understand."

"Understand what?"

"You told me ten days ago that you should like to marry my step-daughter. You have not forgotten it?"

"Forgotten it? I wrote to Mr. Osmond about it this morning."

"Ah," said Isabel, "he did n't mention to me that he had heard from you."

Lord Warburton stammered a little.

"I—I did n't send my letter."

"Perhaps you forgot that."

"No, I was n't satisfied with it. It's an awkward sort of letter to write, you know. But I shall send it to-night."

"At three o'clock in the morning?"

"I mean later, in the course of the day."

"Very good. You still wish, then, to marry her."

"Very much indeed."

"Are n't you afraid that you will bore her?" And as her companion stared at this inquiry, Isabel added, "If she can't dance with you for half an hour, how will she be able to dance with you for life?"

"Ah," said Lord Warburton, readily, "I will let her dance with other people!"

About the cotillon, the fact is I thought that you — that you” —

“That I would dance with you? I told you I would dance nothing.”

“Exactly; so that while it is going on I might find some quiet corner where we might sit down and talk.”

“Oh,” said Isabel gravely, “you are much too considerate of me.”

When the cotillon came, Pansy was found to have engaged herself, thinking, in perfect humility, that Lord Warburton had no intentions. Isabel recommended him to seek another partner, but he assured her that he would dance with no one but herself. As, however, she had, in spite of the remonstrances of her hostess, declined other invitations, on the ground that she was not dancing at all, it was not possible for her to make an exception in Lord Warburton’s favor.

“After all, I don’t care to dance,” he said; “it’s a barbarous amusement. I would much rather talk.” And he intimated that he had discovered exactly the corner he had been looking for, — a quiet nook in one of the smaller rooms, where the music would come to them faintly, and not interfere with conversation. Isabel had decided to let him carry out his idea; she wished to be satisfied. She wandered away from the ball-room with him, though she knew that her husband desired she should not lose sight of his daughter. It was with his daughter’s *prétendant*, however; that would make it right for Osmond. On her way out of the ball-room she came upon Edward Rosier, who was standing in a door-way, with folded arms, looking at the dance, in the attitude of a young man without illusions. She stopped a moment, and asked him if he were not dancing.

“Certainly not, if I can’t dance with her!” he answered.

“You had better go away, then,” said Isabel, with the manner of good counsel.

“I shall not go till she does!” And he let Lord Warburton pass, without giving him a look.

This nobleman, however, had noticed the melancholy youth, and he asked Isabel who her dismal friend was, remarking that he had seen him somewhere before.

“It’s the young man I have told you about, who is in love with Pansy,” said Isabel.

“Ah, yes, I remember. He looks rather bad.”

“He has reason. My husband won’t listen to him.”

“What’s the matter with him?” Lord Warburton inquired. “He seems very harmless.”

“He has n’t money enough, and he is n’t very clever.”

Lord Warburton listened with interest; he seemed struck with this account of Edward Rosier.

“Dear me; he looked a gentleman-like young fellow.”

“So he is, but my husband is very particular.”

“Oh, I see.” And Lord Warburton paused a moment. “How much money has he got?” he then ventured to ask.

“Some forty thousand francs a year.”

“Sixteen hundred pounds? Ah, but that’s very good, you know.”

“So I think. But my husband has larger ideas.”

“Yes; I have noticed that your husband has very large ideas. Is he really an idiot, the young man?”

“An idiot? Not in the least; he’s charming. When he was twelve years old I myself was in love with him.”

“He does n’t look much more than twelve to-day,” Lord Warburton rejoined, vaguely, looking about him. Then, with more point, “Don’t you think we might sit here?” he asked.

“Wherever you please.” The room was a sort of boudoir, pervaded by a subdued, rose-colored light; a lady and

gentleman moved out of it as our friends came in. "It's very kind of you to take such an interest in Mr. Rosier," Isabel said.

"He seems to me rather ill treated. He had a face a yard long; I wondered what ailed him."

"You are a just man," said Isabel. "You have a kind thought even for a rival."

Lord Warburton turned, suddenly, with a stare. "A rival? Do you call him my rival?"

"Surely, if you both wish to marry the same person."

"Yes; but since he has no chance!"

"All the same, I like you for putting yourself in his place. It shows imagination."

"You like me for it?" And Lord Warburton looked at her with an uncertain eye. "I think you mean that you are laughing at me for it."

"Yes, I am laughing at you, a little. But I like you, 'oo."

"Ah well, then, let me enter into his situation a little more. What do you suppose one could do for him?"

"Since I have been praising your imagination, I will leave you to imagine that yourself," Isabel said. "Pansy, too, would like you for that."

"Miss Osmond? Ah, she, I flatter myself, likes me already."

"Very much, I think."

He hesitated a little; he was still questioning her face. "Well, then, I don't understand you. You don't mean that she cares for him?"

"Surely, I have told you that I thought she did."

A sudden blush sprang to his face. "You told me that she would have no wish apart from her father's, and as I have gathered that he would favor me"— He paused a little, and then he added, "Don't you see?" suggestively, through his blush.

"Yes, I told you that she had an immense wish to please her father, and

that it would probably take her very far."

"That seems to me a very proper feeling," said Lord Warburton.

"Certainly; it's a very proper feeling." Isabel remained silent for some moments. The room continued to be empty; the sound of the music reached them, with its richness softened by the interposing apartments. Then at last she said, "But it hardly strikes me as the sort of feeling to which a man would wish to be indebted for a wife."

"I don't know; if the wife is a good one, and he thinks she does well!"

"Yes, of course you must think that."

"I do; I can't help it. You call that very British, of course."

"No, I don't. I think Pansy would do wonderfully well to marry you, and I don't know who should know it better than you. But you are not in love."

"Ah, yes, I am, Mrs. Osmond!"

Isabel shook her head. "You like to think you are, while you sit here with me. But that's not how you strike me."

"I'm not like the young man in the door-way; I admit that. But what makes it so unnatural? Could anything in the world be more charming than Miss Osmond?"

"Nothing, possibly. But love has nothing to do with good reasons."

"I don't agree with you. I am delighted to have good reasons."

"Of course you are. If you were really in love you wouldn't care a straw for them."

"Ah, really in love, — really in love!" Lord Warburton exclaimed, folding his arms, leaning back his head, and stretching himself a little. "You must remember that I am forty years old. I won't pretend that I am as I once was."

"Well, if you are sure," said Isabel, "it's all right."

He answered nothing; he sat there,

with his head back, looking before him. Abruptly, however, he changed his position; he turned quickly to his companion. "Why are you so unwilling, so skeptical?"

She met his eye, and for a moment they looked straight at each other. If she wished to be satisfied, she saw something that satisfied her; she saw in his eye the gleam of an idea that she was uneasy on her own account, — that she was perhaps even frightened. It expressed a suspicion, not a hope, but such as it was it told her what she wished to know. Not for an instant should he suspect that she detected in his wish to marry her step-daughter an implication of increased nearness to herself, or that, if she did detect it, she thought it alarming or compromising. In that brief, extremely personal gaze, however, deeper meanings passed between them than they were conscious of at the moment.

"My dear Lord Warburton," she said, smiling, "you may do, as far as I am concerned, whatever comes into your head."

And with this she got up, and wandered into the adjoining room, where she encountered several acquaintances. While she talked with them she found herself regretting that she had moved; it looked a little like running away, — all the more as Lord Warburton did n't follow her. She was glad of this, how-

ever, and, at any rate, she was satisfied. She was so well satisfied that when, in passing back into the ball-room, she found Edward Rosier still planted in the door-way she stopped and spoke to him again.

"You did right not to go away. I have got some comfort for you."

"I need it," the young man murmured, "when I see you so awfully thick with *him*!"

"Don't speak of him. I will do what I can for you. I am afraid it won't be much, but what I can I will do."

He looked at her with gloomy obliqueness. "What has suddenly brought you round?"

"The sense that you are an inconvenience in the door-ways!" she answered, smiling, as she passed him. Half an hour later she took leave, with Pansy, and at the foot of the staircase the two ladies, with many other departing guests, waited a while for their carriage. Just as it approached, Lord Warburton came out of the house, and assisted them to reach their vehicle. He stood a moment at the door, asking Pansy if she had amused herself; and she, having answered him, fell back with a little air of fatigue. Then Isabel, at the window, detaining him by a movement of her finger, murmured gently, "Don't forget to send your letter to her father!"

Henry James, Jr.

SLEEP'S THRESHOLD.

WHAT footstep but has wandered free and far
 Amid that Castle of Sleep whose walls were planned
 By no terrestrial craft, no human hand,
 With towers that point to no recorded star?
 Here sorrows, memories, and remorse are,
 Roaming the long dim rooms or galleries grand;
 Here the lost friends our spirits yet demand
 Gleam through mysterious doorways, half ajar.