

THE OTHER HOUSE

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The Other House by Henry James

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HENRY JAMES

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OTHER HOUSE**

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BY
HENRY JAMES

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LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN
1897

BOOK FIRST

I

MRS. BEEVER of Eastmead, and of "Beever and Bream," was a close, though not a cruel observer of what went on, as she always said, at the other house. A great deal more went on there, naturally, than in the great clean, square solitude in which she had practically lived since the death of Mr. Beever, who had predeceased by three years his friend and partner, the late Paul Bream of Bounds, leaving to his only son, the little godson of that trusted associate, the substantial share of the business in which his wonderful widow—she knew and rejoiced that she was wonderful—now had a distinct voice. Paul Beever, in the bloom of eighteen, had just achieved a scramble from Winchester to Oxford: it was his mother's design that he should go into as many things as possible before coming into the Bank. The Bank, the pride of Wilverley, the high clear arch of which the two houses were the solid piers, was worth an expensive education. It was, in the talk of town and county, "hundreds of years" old, and as incalculably "good" as a subject of so much infallible arithmetic could very well be. That it enjoyed the services of Mrs. Beever herself was at present enough for her

and an ample contentment to Paul, who inclined so little to the sedentary that she foresaw she should some day be as anxious at putting him into figures as she had in his childhood been easy about putting him into breeches. Half the ground moreover was held by young Anthony Bream, the actual master of Bounds, the son and successor of her husband's colleague.

She was a woman indeed of many purposes; another of which was that on leaving Oxford the boy should travel and inform himself: she belonged to the age that regarded a foreign tour not as a hasty dip, but as a deliberate plunge. Still another had for its main feature that on his final return he should marry the nicest girl she knew: that too would be a deliberate plunge, a plunge that would besprinkle his mother. It would do with the question what it was Mrs. Beever's inveterate household practice to do with all loose and unarranged objects—it would get it out of the way. There would have been difficulty in saying whether it was a feeling for peace or for war, but her constant habit was to lay the ground bare for complications that as yet at least had never taken place. Her life was like a room prepared for a dance: the furniture was all against the walls. About the young lady in question she was perfectly definite; the nicest girl she knew was Jean Martle, whom she had just sent for at Brighton to come and perform in that character. The performance was to be for the benefit of Paul, whose midsummer return was at

hand and in whom the imagination of alternatives was to be discouraged from the first. It was on the whole a comfort to Mrs. Beever that he had little imagination of anything.

Jean Martle, condemned to Brighton by a father who was Mrs. Beever's second cousin and whom the doctors, the great men in London, kept there, as this lady opined, because he was too precious wholly to lose and too boring often to see—Jean Martle would probably some day have money and would possibly some day have sense: even as regards a favoured candidate this marked the extent of Mrs. Beever's somewhat dry expectations. They were addressed in a subordinate degree to the girl's "playing," which was depended on to become brilliant, and to her hair, which was viewed in the light of a hope that it would with the lapse of years grow darker. Wilverley, in truth, would never know if she played ill; but it had an old-fashioned prejudice against loud shades in the natural covering of the head. One of the things his cousin had been invited for was that Paul should get used to her eccentric colour—a colour of which, on a certain bright Sunday of July, Mrs. Beever noted afresh, with some alarm, the exaggerated pitch. Her young friend had arrived two days before and now—during the elastic interval from church to luncheon—had been despatched to Bounds with a message and some preliminary warnings. Jean knew that she should find there a house in some confusion, a new-born little girl, the first, a young mother not

yet "up," and an odd visitor, somewhat older than herself, in the person of Miss Armiger, a school-friend of Mrs. Bream, who had made her appearance a month before that of the child and had stayed on, as Mrs. Beever with some emphasis put it, "right through everything."

This picture of the situation had filled, after the first hour or two, much of the time of the two ladies, but it had originally included for Jean no particular portrait of the head of the family—an omission in some degree repaired, however, by the chance of Mrs. Beever's having on the Saturday morning taken her for a moment into the Bank. They had had errands in the town, and Mrs. Beever had wished to speak to Mr. Bream, a brilliant, joking gentleman, who, instantly succumbing to their invasion and turning out a confidential clerk, had received them in his beautiful private room. "Shall I like him?" Jean, with the sense of a widening circle, had, before this, adventurously asked. "Oh, yes, if you notice him!" Mrs. Beever had replied in obedience to an odd private prompting to mark him as insignificant. Later on, at the Bank, the girl noticed him enough to feel rather afraid of him: that was always with her the foremost result of being noticed herself. If Mrs. Beever passed him over, this was in part to be accounted for by all that at Eastmead was usually taken for granted. The queen-mother, as Anthony Bream kept up the jest of calling her, would not have found it easy to paint off-hand a picture of the allied sovereign whom she

was apt to regard as a somewhat restless vassal. Though he was a dozen years older than the happy young prince on whose behalf she exercised her regency, she had known him from his boyhood, and his strong points and his weak were alike an old story to her.

His house was new—he had on his marriage, at a vast expense, made it quite violently so. His wife and his child were new; new also in a marked degree was the young woman who had lately taken up her abode with him and who had the air of intending to remain till she should lose that quality. But Tony himself—this had always been his name to her—was intensely familiar. Never doubting that he was a subject she had mastered, Mrs. Beever had no impulse to clear up her view by distributing her impressions. These impressions were as neatly pigeon-holed as her correspondence and her accounts—neatly, at least, save in so far as they were besprinkled with the dust of time. One of them might have been freely rendered into a hint that her young partner was a possible source of danger to her own sex. Not to her personally, of course; for herself, somehow, Mrs. Beever was not of her own sex. If she *had* been a woman—she never thought of herself so loosely—she would, in spite of her age, have doubtless been conscious of peril. She now recognised none in life except that of Paul's marrying wrong, against which she had taken early measures. It would have been a misfortune therefore to feel a flaw in a security