

He hesitated, and looked at Lady Loring. She was not the woman to let a fair opportunity escape her. 'We will say to-morrow evening,' she resumed, 'at seven o'clock.'

'To-morrow,' said Romaine. He shook hands with Stella, and left the picture gallery.

Thus far, the conspiracy to marry him promised even more hopefully than the conspiracy to convert him. And Father Benwell, carefully instructing Penrose in the next room, was not aware of it!

But the hours, in their progress, mark the march of events as surely as they mark the march of time. The day passed, the evening came—and, with its coming, the prospects of the conversation brightened in their turn.

Let Father Benwell himself relate how it happened—in extract from his report to Rome, written the same evening.

' . . . I had arranged with Penrose that he should call at my lodgings, and tell me how he had prospered at the first performance of his duties as secretary to Romaine.

'The moment he entered the room, the signs of disturbance in his face told me that something serious had happened. I asked directly if there had been any disagreement between Romaine and himself.

'He repeated the word with every appearance of surprise. "Disagreement?" he said. "No words can tell how sincerely I feel for Mr. Romaine, and how eager I am to be of service to him!"

'Relieved so far, I naturally asked what had happened. Penrose betrayed a marked embarrassment in answering my question.

"I have innocently surprised a secret," he said, "on which I had no right to intrude. All that I can honourably tell you, shall be told. Add to your many kindnesses, Father—and don't command me to speak, when it is my duty towards a sorely-trying man to be silent, even to You."

'It is needless to say that I abstained from directly answering this strange appeal. If I found it necessary to our interests to assert my spiritual authority, I was, of course, resolved to do it. "Let me hear what you *can* tell," I replied, "and then we shall see."

'Upon this, he spoke. I need hardly recall to your memory how careful we were, in first planning the attempt to recover the Vange property, to assure ourselves of the promise of success, which the peculiar character of the present owner held out to us. In reporting what Penrose said, I communicate a discovery, which I venture to think will be as welcome to you as it was to me.

'He began by reminding me of what I had myself told him in speaking of Romaine. "You mentioned having heard from Lord Loring of a great sorrow or remorse from which he was suffering," Penrose said; "and you added that your informant abstained from mentioning what the nature of that remorse, or of the nervous malady connected with it, might be. I know what he suffers, and why he suffers, and with what noble resignation he submits to his affliction."

'There Penrose stopped. You know the emotional nature of the man. It was only by a hard struggle with himself that he abstained from bursting into tears. I gave him time—and then I asked how he made the discovery.

'He hesitated, but he answered plainly, so far. "We were sitting together at the table, looking over his notes and memoranda," Penrose said, "when he suddenly dropped the manuscript from which he was reading to me. A ghastly paleness overspread his face. He started up, and put both his hands to his ears as if he heard something dreadful, and was trying to deafen himself to it. I ran to the door to call for help. He stopped me; he spoke in faint gasping tones, forbidding me to call anyone in to witness what he suffered. It was not the first time, he said; it would soon be