

THE CONVENTIONALISTS

"I believe that is so," said Lady Brasted.

"To a Manchester merchant?"

She nodded discreetly and sadly; but she spoilt it all by immediately adding—

"Of course it is all very beautiful about the dear boy. . . . I do so hope that he has found his true vocation"; by which I understood her to mean that she hoped he had not, and that he would be thoroughly miserable.

"The Prior seems to have no doubt about it," I said.

"Ah, well!"

She confided in me no more; I was plainly a bungler in the *affaire Algy*, though not a positive criminal like Dick. I mentioned that priest's name once to her, but never again. . . .

We went off to the smoking-room presently; and there I observed the ritual which Algy had described to me with such accuracy. We all sat in a semi-circle, our host in his pontifical chair on the right of the empty fire-place, with the whisky and syphons beside him, Harold on the leather couch, and the stranger next him, and I in the place of honour on the left. I smoked a cigarette or two to Mr. Banister's cigar; we spoke of undenominational country affairs and of Westminster Cathedral, and of the village schools. At the moment appointed in the ritual whisky was dispensed; and at a minute or two before eleven the other guest disturbed all the ceremonies by begging leave to go to bed. But it gave Mr. Banister his opportunity.