

to pride. I feel this change as a lesson in humility which is good for me. For example, Lady Loring (as I can plainly see) dislikes and distrusts me. Then, again, a young lady has recently arrived here on a visit. She is a Protestant, with all the prejudices incident to that way of thinking—avoids me so carefully, poor soul, that I have never seen her yet. These rebuffs are wholesome reminders of his fallible human nature, to a man who has occupied a place of high trust and command. Besides, there have been obstacles in my way which have had an excellent effect in rousing my energies. How do you feel, Arthur, when you encounter obstacles?

‘I do my best to remove them, Father. But I am sometimes conscious of a sense of discouragement.’

‘Curious,’ said Father Benwell, ‘I am only conscious, myself, of a sense of impatience. What right has an obstacle to get in *my* way?—that is how I look at it. For example, the first thing I heard, when I came here, was that Romaine had left England. My introduction to him was indefinitely delayed; I had to look to Lord Loring for all the information I wanted, relating to the man and his habits. There was another obstacle! Not living in the house, I was obliged to find an excuse for being constantly on the spot, ready to take advantage of his lordship’s leisure moments for conversation. I sat down in this room; and I said to myself, “before I get up again, I mean to brush these impertinent obstacles out of my way!” The state of the books suggested the idea of which I was in search. Before I left the house, I was charged with the re-arrangement of the library. From that moment, I came and went as often as I liked. Whenever Lord Loring was disposed for a little talk, there I was, to lead the talk in the right direction. And what is the result? On the first occasion when Romaine presents himself, I can place you in a position to become his daily compan-

ion. All due, Arthur, in the first instance, to my impatience of obstacles. Amusing, isn’t it?’

Penrose was perhaps deficient in the sense of humour. Instead of being amused, he appeared to be anxious for more information. ‘In what capacity am I to be Mr. Romaine’s companion?’ he asked.

Father Benwell poured himself out another cup of coffee.

‘Suppose I tell you first,’ he suggested, ‘how Romaine is marked out, by habits and disposition, as a promising subject for conversion. He is young; still a single man; romantic, sensitive, highly cultivated. No near relations are alive to influence him—he is not compromised by any illicit attachment. He has devoted himself for years past to books, and is collecting materials for a work of immense research, on the origin of Religions. Some great sorrow or remorse—Lord Loring did not mention what it was—has told seriously on his nervous system, already injured by night-study. Add to this, that he is now within our reach. He has lately returned to London, and is living quite alone at a private hotel. For some reason which I am not acquainted with, he keeps away from Vange Abbey—the very place, as I should have thought, for a studious man.’

Penrose began to be interested. ‘Have you been to the Abbey?’ he said.

‘I made a little excursion to that part of Yorkshire, Arthur, not long since. A very pleasant trip—apart from the painful associations connected with the ruin and profanation of a sacred place. There is no doubt about the revenues. I know the value of that productive part of the estate which stretches southward, away from the barren region round the house. Let us return for a moment to Romaine, and to your position as his future companion. He has had his books sent to him from Vange; and has persuaded himself that continued