

CHAPTER VI

IT was not until Rankin and the others had left the room that Jewdwine had courage to raise his head tentatively. He had only seen that young man's back, and he still clung to the hope that it might not be Rickman's, after all.

He looked up as steadily as he dared. Oh, no doubt that it was Rickman's back; no doubt, too, that it was his, Jewdwine's, duty to go up and speak to him. The young man had changed his place; he was at his window again, contemplating—as Jewdwine reflected with a pang of sympathy—the shop. So profound, so sacred almost, was his absorption that Jewdwine hesitated in his approach.

"Is it Rickman?" he asked, still tentative.

"Mr. Jewdwine!" Rickman's soul leapt to Jewdwine's from the depths; but the "Mister" marked the space it had had to travel. "When did you come up?"

"Three hours ago." ("He looks innocent," said Jewdwine to himself.)

"Then you weren't prepared for that?"

Jewdwine followed his fascinated gaze. He smiled faintly.

"You haven't noticed our new departure? We not only purchase Gentlemen's Libraries, but we sell the works of persons who may or may not be gentlemen."

Jewdwine felt profoundly uncomfortable. Rickman's face preserved its inimitable innocence, but he continued to stare fixedly before him.

"Poor fellow," thought Jewdwine, "he must have heard those imbecilities." He felt horribly responsible, responsible to the Club for the behaviour of Rickman and responsible to Rickman for the behaviour of the Club. What could he do to make it up to him? Happy thought—he would ask