

'I am entirely at your service, Mr. Romaine.'

'If you will kindly call at my hotel in an hour's time, I shall have looked over my notes, and shall be ready for you with a list of titles and dates. There is the address.'

With those words, he advanced to take his leave of Lady Loring and Stella.

Father Benwell was a man possessed of extraordinary power of foresight—but he was not infallible. Seeing that Romaine was on the point of leaving the house, and feeling that he had paved the way successfully for Romaine's amanuensis, he too readily assumed that there was nothing further to be gained by remaining in the gallery. In arriving at this conclusion, he was additionally influenced by private and personal considerations. The interval before Penrose called at the hotel might be usefully filled up by some wise words of advice, relating to the religious uses to which he might turn his intercourse with Romaine, when he had sufficiently established himself in the confidence of his employer. There might, no doubt, be future opportunities for accomplishing this object—but Father Benwell was not a man to trust too implicitly in the future. The present occasion was, in respect of its certainty, the occasion that he preferred. Making one of his ready and plausible excuses, he returned with Penrose to the library—and so committed (as he himself discovered at a later time) one of the few mistakes in the long record of his life.

In the meanwhile, Romaine was not permitted to bring his visit to a conclusion, without hospitable remonstrance on the part of Lady Loring. She felt for Stella, with a woman's enthusiastic devotion to the interests of true love; and she had firmly resolved that a matter so trifling as the cultivation of Romaine's mind, should not be allowed to stand in the way of the far more important enterprise of

opening his heart to the influence of the sex.

'Stay, and lunch with us,' she said, when he held out his hand to bid her good-bye.

'Thank you, Lady Loring, I never take lunch.'

'Well then, come and dine with us—no party; only ourselves. To-morrow, and next day, we are disengaged. Which day shall it be?'

Romaine still resisted. 'You are very kind. In my state of health, I am unwilling to make engagements which I may not be able to keep.'

Lady Loring was just as resolute on her side. She appealed to Stella. 'Mr. Romaine persists, my dear, in putting me off with excuses. Try if *you* can persuade him.'

'I am not likely to have any influence, Adelaide.'

The tone in which she replied struck Romaine. He looked at her. Her eyes, gravely meeting his eyes, held him with a strange fascination. She was not herself conscious how openly all that was noble and true in her nature, and that was most deeply and sensitively felt in her aspirations, spoke at that moment in her look. Romaine's face changed; he turned pale under the new emotion that she had roused in him. Lady Loring observed him attentively.

'Perhaps you underrate your influence, Stella?' she suggested.

Stella remained impenetrable to persuasion. 'I have only been introduced to Mr. Romaine half an hour since,' she said. 'I am not vain enough to suppose that I can produce a favourable impression on any one on so short a time.'

She had expressed, in other words, Romaine's own idea of himself, in speaking of her to Lord Loring. He was struck by the coincidence.

'Perhaps we have begun, Miss Eyre-court, by misinterpreting one another,' he said. 'We may arrive at a better understanding, when I have the honour of meeting you again.'