

sense which understands. I am afraid, Father, it may be my vanity and presumption.'

Father Benwell leaned back luxuriously in his chair. 'I like that modesty,' he said, with a relishing smack of his lips as if modesty was as good as a meal to him. 'There is power of the right sort, Arthur, hidden under the diffidence that does you honour. I am more than ever satisfied that I have been right in reporting you as worthy of this most serious trust. I believe the conversion of the owner of Vange Abbey is—in your hands—no more than a matter of time.'

'May I ask what his name is?'

'Certainly. His name is Lewis Romaine.'

'When do you introduce me to him?'

'Impossible to say. I have not yet been introduced myself.'

'You don't know Mr. Romaine?'

'I have never even seen him.'

These discouraging replies were made with the perfect composure of a man who saw his way clearly before him. Sinking from one depth of perplexity to another, Penrose ventured on putting a last question. 'How am I to approach Mr. Romaine?' he asked.

'I can only answer that, Arthur, by admitting you still further into my confidence. It is disagreeable to me,' said the reverend gentleman, with the most becoming humility, 'to speak of myself. But it must be done. Shall we have a little coffee, to help us through the coming extract from Father Benwell's autobiography? Don't look so serious, my son! When the occasion permits it, let us take life lightly.' He rang the bell and ordered the coffee, as if he were the master of the house. The servant treated him with the most scrupulous respect. He hummed a little tune, and talked at intervals of the weather, while they were waiting. 'Plenty of sugar, Arthur?' he inquired, when the coffee was brought in. 'No? Even in trifles, I

should have been glad to feel that there was perfect sympathy between us. I like plenty of sugar myself.'

Having sweetened his coffee with the closest attention to the process, he was at liberty to enlighten his young friend. He did it so easily and so cheerfully, that a far less patient man than Penrose would have listened to him with interest.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE INTRODUCTION TO ROMAYNE.

'EXCEPTING my employment here in the library,' Father Benwell began, 'and some interesting conversation with Lord Loring, to which I shall presently allude, I am almost as great a stranger in this house, Arthur, as yourself. When the object which we now have in view was first taken seriously into consideration, I had the honour of being personally acquainted with Lord Loring. I was also aware that he was an intimate and trusted friend of Romaine. Under these circumstances, his lordship presented himself to our point of view, as a means of approaching the owner of Vange Abbey without exciting distrust. I was charged accordingly with the duty of establishing myself on terms of intimacy in this house. By way of making room for me, the spiritual director of Lord and Lady Loring was attached, in some inferior capacity, to a mission abroad. And here I am in his place! By-the-way, don't treat me (when we are in the presence of visitors) with any special marks of respect. I am not Provincial of our Order in Lord Loring's house—I am one of the inferior clergy.'

Penrose looked at him with admiration. 'It is a great sacrifice to make, Father, in your position, and at your age.'

'Not at all, Arthur. A position of authority involves certain temptations