

THE DIVINE FIRE

As he rose he spoke slowly and impressively. "What you've got to do is to pull yourself together. You can't afford to be dissolute, or even dissipated."

Rickman looked hard at Jewdwine's boots. Irreproachable boots, well made, well polished, unspotted by the world. And the only distinguishable word in Rickman's answer was "Life." And as he said "Life" he blushed like a girl when for the first time she says "Love," a blush of rapture and of shame, her young blood sensitive to the least hint of apathy in her audience.

Jewdwine's apathy was immense.

"Another name for the fugitive actuality," he said. "Well, I'm afraid I haven't any more time—" He looked round the room a little vaguely, and as he did so he laid on the young man's shoulder a delicate fastidious hand. "There are one or two men here I should have liked to introduce you to, if I'd had time.—Another night, perhaps—" He piloted him downstairs and so out into the Strand.

"Good night. Good night. Take my advice and leave the fugitive actuality alone."

Those were Jewdwine's last words, spoken from the depths of the hansom. It carried him to the classic heights of Hampstead, to the haunts of the cultivated, the intellectual, the refined.

Rickman remained a moment. His dreamy gaze was fixed on the massive pile before him, that rose, solidly soaring, flaunting a brutal challenge to the tender April sky. It stood for the vast material reality, the whole of that eternal, implacable Power which is at enmity with dreams; which may be conquered, propitiated, absorbed, but never annihilated or denied.

That actuality was not fugitive.