

that a greater change might be of use to you?’

‘Don’t ask me about it, Loring! I can go through my ordeal—but I hate speaking of it.’

‘Let us speak of something else then,’ said Lord Loring. ‘What do you think of Miss Eyrecourt?’

‘A very striking face; full of expression and character. Leonardo would have painted a noble portrait of her. But there is something in her manner——’ He stopped, unwilling or unable to finish the sentence.

‘Something you don’t like?’ Lord Loring suggested.

‘No; something I don’t quite understand. One doesn’t expect to find any embarrassment in the manner of a well-bred woman. And yet, she seemed to be embarrassed when she spoke to me. Perhaps I produced an unfortunate impression on her.’

Lord Loring laughed. ‘In any man but you, Romaine, I should call that affectation.’

‘Why?’ Romaine asked sharply.

Lord Loring looked unfeignedly surprised. ‘My dear fellow, do you really think you are the sort of man who impresses a woman unfavourably at first sight? For once in your life, indulge in the amiable weakness of doing yourself justice—and find a better reason for Miss Eyrecourt’s embarrassment.’

For the first time since he and his friend had been talking together, Romaine turned towards Stella. He innocently caught her in the act of looking at him. A younger woman, or a woman of weaker character, would have looked away again. Stella’s noble head dropped; her eyes sank slowly, until they rested on her long white hands crossed upon her lap. For a moment more Romaine looked at her with steady attention. He roused himself, and spoke to Lord Loring in lowered tones.

‘Have you known Miss Eyrecourt for a long time?’

‘She is my wife’s oldest and dearest

friend. I think, Romaine, you would feel interested in Stella, if you saw more of her.’

Romaine bowed in silent submission to Lord Loring’s prophetic remark. ‘Let us look at the pictures,’ he said quietly.

As he moved down the gallery, the two priests met him. Father Benwell saw his opportunity of helping Penrose to produce a favourable impression.

‘Forgive the curiosity of an old student, Mr. Romaine,’ he said in his pleasant, cheerful way. ‘Lord Loring tells me you have sent to the country for your books. Do you find a London hotel favourable to study?’

‘It is a very quiet hotel,’ Romaine answered; ‘and the people know my ways.’ He turned to Arthur. ‘I have my own set of rooms, Mr. Penrose,’ he continued—‘with a room at your disposal. I used to enjoy the solitude of my house in the country. My tastes have lately changed—there are times now when I want to see the life in the streets, as a relief. Though we are in an hotel, I can promise that you will not be troubled by interruptions, when you kindly lend me the use of your pen.’

Father Benwell answered before Penrose could speak. ‘You may perhaps find my young friend’s memory of some use to you, Mr. Romaine, as well as his pen. Penrose has studied in the Vatican Library. If your reading leads you that way, he knows more than most men of the rare old manuscripts which treat of the early history of Christianity.’

This delicately-managed reference to Romaine’s projected work on ‘The Origin of Religions’ produced its effect. He became instantly interested in Penrose and his studies. ‘I should like very much to speak to you about those manuscripts,’ he said. ‘Copies of some of them may perhaps be in the British Museum. Is it asking too much to inquire if you are disengaged this morning?’