

traction to his personal appearance, of which it stood in some need. In stature he was little and lean; his hair had become prematurely thin over his broad forehead; there were hollows already in his cheeks, and marks on either side of his thin delicate lips. He looked like a person who had passed many miserable hours in needless despair of himself and his prospects. With all this there was something in him so irresistibly truthful and sincere—so suggestive, even where he might be wrong, of a purely conscientious belief in his own errors—that he attached people to him without an effort, and often without being aware of it himself. What would his friends have said if they had been told that the religious enthusiasm of this gentle, self-distrustful, melancholy man might, in its very innocence of suspicion and self-seeking, be perverted to dangerous uses in unscrupulous hands? His friends would, one and all, have received the scandalous assertion with contempt; and Penrose himself, if he had heard of it, might have failed to control his temper for the first time in his life.

‘May I ask a question, without giving offence?’ he said, timidly.

Father Benwell took his hand. ‘My dear Arthur, let us open our minds to each other without reserve. What is your question?’

‘You have spoken, Father, of a great trust that is about to be placed in me.’

‘Yes. You are anxious, no doubt, to hear what it is?’

‘I am anxious to know, in the first place, if it requires me to go back to Oxford.’

Father Benwell dropped his young friend’s hand. ‘Do you dislike Oxford?’ he asked, observing Penrose attentively.

‘Bear with me, Father, if I speak too confidently. I dislike the deception which has obliged me to conceal that I am a Catholic and a priest.’

Father Benwell set this little difficulty right, with the air of a man who

could make benevolent allowance for unreasonable scruples. ‘I think, Arthur, you forget two important considerations,’ he said. ‘In the first place, you have a dispensation from your superiors, which absolves you of all responsibility in respect of the concealment that you have practised. In the second place, we could only obtain information of the progress which our Church is silently making at the University, by employing you in the capacity of—let me say, an independent Observer. However, if it will contribute to your ease of mind, I see no objection to informing you that you will *not* be instructed to return to Oxford. Do I relieve you?’

There could be no question of it. Penrose breathed more freely, in every sense of the word.

‘At the same time,’ Father Benwell continued, ‘let us not misunderstand each other. In the new sphere of action which we design for you, you will not only be at liberty to acknowledge that you are a Catholic, it will be absolutely necessary that you should do so. But you will continue to wear the ordinary dress of an English gentleman, and to preserve the strictest secrecy on the subject of your admission to the priesthood, until you are further advised by myself. Now, dear Arthur, read that paper. It is the necessary preface to all that I have yet to say to you.’

The ‘paper’ contained a few pages of manuscript, relating to the early history of Vange Abbey, in the days of the monks, and the circumstances under which the property was confiscated to lay uses in the time of Henry the Eighth. Penrose handed back the little narrative, vehemently expressing his sympathy with the monks, and his detestation of the King.

‘Compose yourself, Arthur,’ said Father Benwell, smiling pleasantly. ‘We don’t mean to allow Henry the Eighth to have it all his own way for ever.’

Penrose looked at his superior in