

THE DIVINE FIRE

The question was, having understood Rickman, having discovered in him a neglected genius, having introduced him to the Club and asked him to dinner on the strength of it, how much further was he prepared to go? Why—provided he was sure of the genius, almost any length, short of introducing him to the ladies of his family. But was he sure? Savage Rickman was young, and youth is deceptive. Supposing he—Jewdwine—was deceived? Supposing the genius were to elude him, leaving him saddled with the man? What on earth should he do with him?

Things had been simpler in the earlier days of their acquaintance, when the counter stood between them, and formed a firm natural barrier to closer intercourse. Nobody, not even Jewdwine, knew what that handshake across the counter had meant for Rickman; how his soul had hungered and thirsted for Jewdwine's society; how, in "the little rat 'ole in the City," it had consumed itself with longing. It was his first great passion, a passion that waited upon chance; to be gratified for five minutes, ten minutes at the most. Once Jewdwine had hung about the shop for half an hour talking; the interview being broken by Rickman's incessant calls to the counter. Once, they had taken a walk together down Cheapside, which from that moment became a holy place. Then came the day when, at Jewdwine's invitation, *Helen in Leuce* travelled down from London to Oxford, and from Oxford to Harmouth. Her neo-classic beauty appealed to Jewdwine's taste (and to the taste of Jewdwine's cousin); he recognized in Rickman a disciple, and was instantly persuaded of his genius. At one bound Rickman had leapt the barrier of the counter; and here he was, enthusiastic and devoted. To be sure, his devotion was not fed largely upon praise; for, unlike the younger man, Jewdwine admired but sparingly. Neither was it tainted with any thought of material advantage. Jewdwine was very free with his criticism and advice; but, beyond these high intellectual aids, it never occurred to Rickman that he had anything to gain by Jewdwine's friendship. Discipleship is the purest of all human relations.

Jewdwine divined this purity, and was touched by it. He prepared to accept a certain amount of responsibility.