

John Raymond was surprised and a little amused at himself. On principle he never gave alms to street-beggars ; his charities consisted solely in large donations to hospitals and asylums who blazoned his name on their yearly reports.

"I'm glad I did it," he muttered as he sank into his luxurious armchair, "Now I wonder what a man of my stamp could fall back on if deprived of sight and money. Not love certainly. There is none in my life. And 'religion' I voluntarily gave up !"

This last was a sad fact. During the early days of his business career he had decided it was impossible to serve God and Mammon, and had chosen Mammon. He had cast aside his precious birthright, the Catholic Faith, lest its precepts interfere with his ambitions, and had persuaded himself that after all, religious observances were unnecessary when one's social code of ethics was unimpeachable.

It was true he was honest and upright in his dealings with humanity, but he was considered a cold, hard, implacable man, and no one had a good word to say of him, — no one, that is except his sister, Beatrice, who persisted in loving him through long years of estrangement.

His thoughts reverted to her now. The devotion of the blind man to the sister for whom he begged had caused him a pang of reproach and remorse.

Three decades had passed since last he saw Beatrice. In defiance of his wishes she had married his clerk, Robert Langdon, and he had there and then washed his hands of both of them. Through various sources he knew that she had had a hard struggle for existence, but he would not help her, and his inflexible will prevented him from accepting the olive-branch she held out to him each Christmas Eve. It came in the shape of a little note, which he always handed to his secretary for formal acknowledgment.

Suddenly he sprang up and going up to the table examined the pile of letters that lay on it. "No, there's nothing here from her," he exclaimed, "It's the first Christmas she has failed me since we parted !" Then, with a bitter laugh, "Probably she has read the evening