

"You may."

"After all," added the young vicar in a low tone, "it will be better for yourself too; you will realise it when you are in a calmer mood. It is impossible now to repair the harm you have done. No remorse on your part can give Vivian back his life which might have been so different. And your talents are valuable to other people. Cannot you find solace in the consciousness of doing your best?"

"Of course," said Garth, "I have always done my best. You don't understand. Never mind."

St John drew back a little huffily. He had spoken to his brother in a tone of Christian gentleness and forbearance, which he had deserved a better reception, in his opinion, than Stephen's half-brusque, half-impatient reply. It was true he did not understand. His brother, whom he had known all his life, had become as a stranger to him—as a stranger whose conduct inspired horror and anguish instead of admiration, whose true character was a mystery, whose thoughts he could not follow. It was a hideous disappointment, a frightful awakening. The discovery that his father had been disreputable had been a shock, but nothing to this. Distance had dimmed the ugliness of the thing which had pained him, making it little more than a vision of the "might have been" which happily was not. Stephen's assurances of the old man's death had eased his mind, although unconsciously perhaps; it had never seemed quite possible that he could have a father who had been silent for twenty years, of whom he might be ashamed.

But this—this was as real as his own body and brains, as the sunlight, as his wife and child.

That it should be Stephen of them all who had stumbled, and stumbled so badly, on the steep and narrow way!—Stephen, whom he had always regarded as a rock of righteousness; Stephen, the elder brother for whom his love and admiration had grown with his growth; Stephen, who had been the domestic ambition through so many years, the staff of his mother, his sisters' guardian, his own guide, mentor, and friend!

How true it is that no man knows his brother! The mystery of the human soul, who can fathom it? He had always looked