

had sunk their voices, as though they were discussing a guilty secret. Ripley Court invited a subdued, deferential tone.

"You wanted me to come with you," said Hatherly, half to himself.

Sir Aylmer nodded.

"If we had our time over again, Ted. . . ."

Hatherly wrinkled his nose and thrust out his lower lip dubiously.

"With power to look into the future?" he asked. "I should have come. Any man born of woman would have come. I don't say that I shouldn't have regretted it later, of course."

Sir Aylmer lay back like a venerable, dying king on a carved throne.

"I sometimes—wonder—whether I should have gone—at all," he said very slowly.

On that bleak March morning thirty years before, Aylmer Lancing, barrister-at-law, had called in Lincoln's Inn Fields to take farewell of his only friend. Then and always, unlike Deryk, he lacked the art of making friends easily; Hatherly he had met six or eight years earlier at a Fleet Street chop-house, and an acquaintance begun over a game of dominoes had ripened into a friendship based on loneliness and common poverty. Hatherly was an article clerk; Lancing, by the desire of his father, who was an unprosperous general practitioner in Cheshire, had lately got himself called to the Bar and was entering upon the lean, early years of a profession that from the first was profoundly uncongenial to him. His mental qualities of tenacity and slow commonsense were always obscured by inelasticity. For half a dozen years he added to his father's modest allowance by an occasional summons or dock defence, but in all that time his fees on circuit did not pay his expenses, and of a London practice he had nothing at all. The modest allowance paid his share of a clerk and chamber-rent and a subscription to the Law Reports; he contrived further to feed and clothe himself and to con-