

IX

That night when, very late, Mr. Harding and Malling returned to the red doll's house and let themselves into it with a latch-key, they found lying upon the table in the little hall a brown envelop.

"A telegram!" said the rector.

He took it into his hand and read the name on the envelop.

"It's for me. Malling, do you know whom this telegram is from?"

"How can I, or you, for that matter?"

"It is from Henry Chichester, and it is to recall me to London."

"It may be so."

"It is so. Open it for me."

Malling took the telegram from him and tore it open, while he sat heavily down by the table.

"Please return if possible difficulties in the parish Benyon ill need your Presence Chichester."

Malling looked down at the rector.

"You see!" Mr. Harding said slowly.

"What do you mean to do?"

Mr. Harding got up from his chair with an effort like that of a weary man.

"I wonder where the railway-guide is?" he said. "Excuse me for a moment, Mr. Malling."

He went away into the drawing-room, and returned with the railway-guide open in his hand.

Malling," he said, using the greater familiarity he had for a moment discarded, "I am about to do a rude thing, but I ask you, I beg of you, to acquit me of any rude intention toward yourself. I have been looking up the Sunday trains. I find I can catch a good one at Faversham to-morrow morning. There is a motor I can hire in the town to get there. It stands just by the post-office, where the road branches." He paused, looking into Malling's face as if in search of some sign of vexation or irony. "With a large parish on my hands," he went on, "I have a great responsibility. And if Benyon, my second curate, is ill, they will be short-handed."

"I see."

"What distresses me greatly—greatly—is leaving you, my guest, at such short notice. I cannot say how I regret it."

He stopped. Purposely, to test him, Malling said nothing, but waited with an expressionless face.

"I cannot say. But how can I do otherwise? My duty to the parish must come before all things."

"I see," said Malling again.

Looking greatly disturbed, Mr. Harding continued:

"I will ask you to do me a very great favor. Although I am obliged to go, I hope you will stay, I entreat you to stay till Monday. The professor is here. You will not be companionless. The servants will do everything to make you comfortable. As to food, wine—everything is provided for. Will you stay? I shall feel more at ease in going if I know my departure has not shortened your visit."

"It is very good of you," Malling replied. "I'll accept your kind offer. To tell the truth, I'm in no hurry to leave the Tankerton air."

"Thank you," said the rector, almost with fervor. "Thank you."

So, the next morning, Mr. Harding went away in the hired motor, and Malling found himself alone in the red doll's house.

He was not sorry. The rector's revelation on the previous night had well repaid him for his journey; then the air of Tankerton really rejoiced him; and he would have speech of the professor.

"I shall lay it before Stepton," he had said to Mr. Harding the previous night, after they had parted from the professor.

And he had spoken with authority. Mr. Harding's confidence, his self-abasement, and his almost despairing appeal, had surely given Malling certain rights. He intended to use them to the full. The rector's abrupt relapse into reserve, his pitiful return to subterfuge, after the receipt of that hypnotizing telegram, had not, in Malling's view, abrogated those rights.

When the motor disappeared, he strolled across the grass with a towel and had a dip in the brown sea, going in off the long shoal that the Whitstable and Tankerton folk call "the Street." Then he set out to find the professor.

His interview with Stepton on the previous night in the presence of Mr. Harding had been rather brief. Stepton had been preoccupied and monosyllabic. Agnes had been right as to his reason for honoring the coast of Kent with his company, but wrong as to the haunted house's location. It was not in Birchington, but lay inland, within easy reach of Tankerton. When he met Malling and Harding, the professor was going to his hotel, where a motor was waiting to convey him to the house, in which he intended to pass the night. His mind was fixed tenaciously upon the matter in hand. Malling had realized at once that it was not the moment to disturb him by the introduction of any other affair, however interesting. But his suggestion of a meeting the next morning was thus welcomed:

"Right! I shall be at home at churchtime—as you're not preaching."

The second half of the sentence was directed to Mr. Harding, who said nothing.

"And you might give me a cup of tea in the afternoon," the professor had added, looking at the rector rather narrowly before shambling off to his hotel to get the plaid shawl which he often wore at night.

"With the greatest pleasure. Minors is the name of the house," had been Mr. Harding's reply.

Whereupon the professor had vanished, muttering to himself:

"Minors! And why not Majors, if you come to that? Perhaps too suggestive of heart-breaking military men. Minors is safer in a respectable seaside place."

The professor had been up all night, but looked much as usual, and was eating a hearty breakfast of bacon and eggs in the cheerful coffee-room when Malling arrived. He scarcely ever ate at orthodox hours, and had frequently been caught lunching at restaurants in London between four and five in the afternoon.

"Where's the rector? At church?" was his greeting.

"The rector has gone back to London," replied Malling, sitting down by the table.

"What about my cup of tea, then?" snapped Stepton.

"I will be your host. I'm here till to-morrow. Any interesting manifestations?"

"A rat or two and a hysterical kitchen-maid seem to be the responsible agents in the building up of the reputation of the house I kept awake in last night."

"I believe I have a more interesting problem for you."

The professor stretched out a sinewy hand. "Cambridge marmalade! Most encouraging!" he muttered. "Have the reverend gentlemen of St. Joseph's been at it again—successfully?"

"I want you to judge."

And thereupon Malling laid the case faithfully before the professor, describing not only the dinner in Hornton Street and his interview with Lady Sophia, but also the two sermons he had heard at St. Joseph's, and the rector's lamentable outburst of the previous night. This last, having a remarkably retentive memory, he reproduced in the main in Mr. Harding's own words, omitting only the rector's reference to his moral lapses. During the whole time he was speaking Stepton was closely engaged with the Cambridge marmalade, and showed no symptoms of attention to anything else. When he ceased, Stepton remarked:

"Really, clergymen are far more to be depended upon for valuable manifestations than a rat or two and a hysterical kitchen-maid. Come to my room, Malling."

The professor had a bedroom facing the sea. He led Malling to it, shut the door, gave Malling a cane chair, sat down himself, in a peculiar, crab-like posture, upon the bed, and said:

"Now give me as minute a psychological study of the former and actual Henry Chichester as you can."

Malling complied with this request as lucidly and tersely as he could, wasting no words.

"Any unusual change in his outward man since you knew him two years ago?" asked the professor, when he had finished.

Malling mentioned the question as to the curate's eyes and mouth which had risen in his mind, and added:

"But the character of the man is so changed that it may have suggestioned me into feeling as if there were physical change in him, too."

"More than would be inevitable in any man in a couple of years. And now as to his digestive organs."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Malling.

The apparent vagaries of his companion very seldom surprised him, but this time he was completely taken aback.

"Are they what they were? Assuming, on your part, a knowledge of what they were."

"I don't know either in what condition they are now, or in what condition they were once."

"Ah! Now I must draw up a report about last night. I '11 come for that cup of tea to Minors—might almost as well have been Majors, even granting the military flavor—about five."

Malling took his departure.

At a quarter to five he heard the click of the garden gate, and looking out at the latticed window of the hall, he saw the professor walking side-wise up the path, with a shawl round his shoulders. He went to let him in, and took him into the tiny drawing-room.

"An odd shell for Harding!" observed the professor. "More suitable to a bantam than to a Cochin-China!"

"It does n't belong to him."

"Nor he to it. Very wise and right of him to go back to Onslow Gardens."

A maid brought in the tea, and the professor, spread strangely forth in a small, chintz-covered arm-chair, enjoyed it while he talked about oysters and oyster-beds. He was deeply interested in the oysters of Whitstable, and held forth almost romantically on their birth and upbringing, the fattening, the packing, the selling, and the eating of them—"with lemon, not vinegar, mind! To eat vinegar with a Whitstable native is as vicious as to offer a libation of catchup at the altar of a meadow mushroom just picked up out of the dew."

Malling did not attempt to turn his mind from edibles. The professor had to be let alone. When tea was finished and cleared away, he observed:

“And now, Malling, what is your view? Do you look upon it as a case of transferred personality? I rather gathered from your general tone that you were mentally drifting in that direction.”

“But are there such cases? Of double transfer, I mean?”

“Personally I have never verified one. When you spoke of the reverend gentlemen for the first time, I said, ‘Study the link!’ There will be development in the link if—all the rest of it.”

“There has been development, as I told you. The link is on his side now.”

“That’s remarkable, undoubtedly. Has it ever struck you that Harding was almost too successful a clergyman to be a genuinely holy man?”

“What do you mean?”

“There’s a modesty in holiness that is hardly adapted to catch smart women.”

“You used to go to hear Harding preach.”

“And d’ you know why I liked his sermons?”

“Because he understood doubt so well. That amused me. But the man who has such a comprehensive understanding of skepticism, is very seldom a true believer. One thing, though, Harding certainly does believe in, judging by a sermon I once heard him preach.”

“And that is?”

“Manicheism. Chichester, you say, was a saint?”

“He was, if a man can be a saint who has a certain amiable weakness of character.”

“And now? You think he would be a difficult customer to tackle now?”

“Harding finds him so.”

“And Harding was an overwhelming chap, cocksure of himself. Chichester must be difficult. Shall I tackle him?”

“I wish you would. But how? Do you wish me to introduce him to you?”

“Let me see.”

The professor dropped his head and remained silent for a minute or two.

“Tell me something,” he at length remarked, lifting his head and assuming his most terrier-like aspect. “Do you think Harding a whited sepulcher?”

“Possibly.”

“And do you think his saintly curate has found it out?”

“Do you think that would supply a natural explanation of the mystery?”

“Should you prefer to search for it in that malefic region which is the abiding-place of nervous dyspepsia?”

“How could—”

“Acute nervous dyspepsia, complicated by a series of sittings under the rose, might eat away the most brazen self-confidence. That’s as certain as that I wear whiskers and you don’t. Shall we do an addition sum? Shall we add Chichester’s discovery of secret lapses in his worshiped rector’s life, to the nervous dyspepsia and the sittings? Shall we do that?”

“And Lady Sophia?”

“There’s a sunflower type of woman. The rising sun can’t escape her inevitable worship.”

“The change in Harding may be a natural one. But there is something portentous in the change in Chichester,” said Malling. “You know I’m a rather cool hand, and certainly not inclined to easy credulity. But there’s something about Chichester which—well, Professor, I’ll make a confession to you that is n’t a pleasant one for any man to make. There’s something about Chichester which shakes my nerves.”

“And you have n’t got nervous dyspepsia?”

“Should I be even a meliorist—as I am—if I had?”

“I must know Chichester. It’s a pity I did n’t know him formerly.”

“I don’t believe that matters,” said Malling, with intense conviction. “There is that in him which must strike you and affect you, whether you knew him as he was or not.”

“So long as I don’t turn tail and run from him, all’s well. I will tackle Chichester. In the interests of science I will face this curate. But how shall I approach him? As in golf, the approach is much, if not everything.”

He sat thinking for some minutes, with his eyebrows twitching. Then he said:

“The question is, Should the approach be casual or direct? Shall I describe a curve, or come to him as the crow comes when making for a given point—or is said to come, for I’ve never investigated that matter? What do you say?”

“It’s very difficult to say. On the day I dined in Hornton Street, Chichester certainly wanted to tell me something. He asked me to dine, I am almost sure, in order that he might tell it to me.”

“About the sittings with Harding, no doubt.”

“That, perhaps, and something more.”

“But he told you nothing.”

“Directly.”

“Do you think he would be more or less likely to unbosom himself now than he was then?”

“Less likely.”

“You might give me his address.”

Malling did so. The professor wrote the address down on a slip of paper, pinned the slip carefully to the yellow lining of his jacket, and then got up to go.

But Malling detained him.

“Professor,” he said, speaking with an unusual hesitation, “you know why I told you all this.”

“In the interests of science?”

“No, in the interest of that miserable man, Marcus Harding. I want you to break the link that binds him to Henry Chichester—if there is one. I want you to effect his release.”

“I’m afraid you’ve come to the wrong man,” returned Stepton, dryly. “My object in entering into this matter is merely to increase my knowledge, not to destroy my chance of increasing it.”

“But surely—”

“We shall never get forward if we move in the midst of a fog of pity and sentiment.”

Malling said no more; but as he watched the professor shambling to the garden gate, he felt as if he had betrayed Marcus Harding,

X

Soon after Malling had returned to London, he received the following note from Mr. Harding:

Onslow Gardens, June —th.

Dear Mr. Malling:

I seem to have some remembrance of your saying to me at Tankerton that you wished to speak to Professor Stepton with regard to a certain matter. I may be wrong in my recollection. If, however, I am right, I now beg you not to speak to the professor. I have, of course, the very highest regard for his discretion; nevertheless, one must not be selfish. One must not think only of one’s self. I have obligations to others, and I fear, when we were together at Tankerton, I forgot them. A word of assurance from you that Professor Stepton knows nothing of our conversation will set at rest the mind of

Yours sincerely,

Marcus Harding.

As soon as he had read this communication, Malling realized that he had been right in his supposition that a new reserve was growing up in Henry Chichester. He was aware of Chichester's reserve in the letter of the rector. He was aware, too, of the latter's situation as he had never been aware of it before. Often a trifle illuminates a life, as a search-light brings some distant place from the darkness into a fierce radiance that makes it seem near. So it was now.

"Poor Harding!" thought Malling, with an unusual softness. "But this letter comes too late."

What answer should he return to the rector? He hated insincerity, but on this occasion he stooped to it. He had not only the fear of Stepton upon him; he had also the desire not to add to the deep misery of Marcus Harding. This was his answer:

Cadogan Square, June —.

Dear Mr. Harding:

In reply to your letter, I will not now repeat our conversation of the other evening to Professor Stepton. He is, as you say, a man of the highest discretion, and should you feel inclined yourself to take him into your confidence at any time, I think you will not regret it.

Yours sincerely,
Evelyn Malling.

As he put this note into an envelope, Malling said to himself:

"Some day I'll let him know I deceived him; I'll let him know I had already told the professor."

Two or three days later Malling heard of the professor having been at a party in Piccadilly at which Lady Sophia was a guest.

"And do you know, really,"—Malling's informant, a lively married woman, concluded, "those old scientific men are quite as bad as any of the boys who only want to have a good time. The professor sat in Lady Sophia's pocket the whole evening! Literally in her pocket!"

"I did n't know modern women had pockets," returned Malling.

"They don't, of course; but you know what I mean."

Malling understood that the professor was beginning his "approach."

A week went by, and at a man's dinner, Malling chanced to sit next to Blandford Sikes, one of the most noted physicians of the day. In the course of conversation the doctor remarked:

"Is your friend Stepton going to set up in Harley Street?"

"Not that I know of," said Malling. "What makes you ask?"

"He came to consult me the other day, and when I told him he was as sound as Big Ben he sat with me for over half an hour pumping me unmercifully on the subject of nervous dyspepsia. The patient who followed, and who happened to be a clergyman, looked fairly sick when he was let in at last."

Who happened to be a clergyman! Malling had longed to ask Blandford Sikes a question—who that clergyman was. But he refrained. To do so, would doubtless have seemed oddly inquisitive. It was surely enough for him to know that the professor was busily at work in his peculiar way. And Malling thought again of that "approach." Evidently the professor must be describing the curve he had spoken of. When would he arrive at Henry Chichester? There were moments when Malling felt irritated by Stepton's silence. That it was emulated by Marcus Harding, Lady Sophia, and Henry Chichester did not make matters easier for him. However, he had deliberately chosen to put this strange affair into Stepton's hands. Stepton had shown no special alacrity with regard to the matter. Malling felt that he could do nothing now but wait.

He waited.

Now and then rumors reached him of Marcus Harding's fading powers, now and then he heard people discussing one of Henry Chichester's "remarkable sermons," now and then in society some feminine gossip murmuring that "Sophia Harding seems to be perfectly sick of that husband of hers. She probably wishes now that she had taken all her people's advice and refused him. Of course if he had been made a *bishop!*"

The season ended. Goodwood was over, and Malling went off to Munich and Bayreuth for music. Then he made a walking-tour with friends in the Oberammergau district, and returned to England only when the ruddy banners of autumn were streaming over the land.

Still there was no communication from the professor. Malling might of course have written to him or sought him. He preferred to possess his soul in patience. Stepton was an arbitrary personage, and the last man in the world to consent to a process of pumping.

Meanwhile Stepton had forgotten all about Malling. He was full of work of various kinds, but the work that most interested him was connected with the reverend gentlemen of St. Joseph's. As Malling surmised, he had lost little time in beginning his "approach," and that approach had been rather circuitous. He had taken his own advice and studied the link. This done, the intricate and fascinating subject of nervous dyspepsia had claimed his undivided attention. When he had finished his prolonged interview with Blandford Sikes, sidling back to the waiting-room to gather up various impedimenta, he had encountered the unfortunate clergyman whom he had kept waiting. Marcus Harding was the man. They exchanged only a couple of words, but the sight of the flaccid bulk, the hanging cheeks and hands, the eyes in which dwelt a sort of faded despair, whipped up into keen alertness every faculty of the professor's mind. As he walked into Cavendish Square he muttered to himself:

"I never saw a clergyman look more promising for investigation, by Jove! Never! There's something in it. Malling was not entirely wrong. There's certainly something in it."

But what? Now for Henry Chichester!

Stepton was by nature unemotional, but he was an implicit believer in the hysteria of others, and he thought clergymen, as a class, more liable to that malady than other classes of men. Curates, being as a rule young clergymen, were, in his view, specially subject to the inroads of the cloudy complaint, which causes the mind to see mountains where only mole-hills exist, and to appreciate anything more readily and accurately than the naked truth. Henry Chichester was young and he was a curate. He was therefore likely to be emotional and to be attracted by the mysterious, more especially since he had recently been knocking on its door, according to Malling's statement.

After a good deal of thought, the professor resolved to cast aside convention, and to make Chichester's acquaintance without any introduction; indeed, with the maximum of informality.

He learned something about Chichester's habits, and managed to meet him several times when he was walking from the daily service at St. Joseph's to his rooms in Hornton Street. In this walk Chichester passed the South Kensington Museum. What more natural than that the professor should chance to be coming out of it?

The first time they met, Stepton looked at the curate casually, the second time more sharply, the third time with scrutiny. He knew how to make a crescendo. The curate noticed it, as of course the professor intended. He did not know who Stepton was, but he began to wonder about this birdlike, sharp-looking man, who evidently took an interest in him. And presently his wonder changed into suspicion. This again accorded with the professor's intention.

One day, after the even-song at St. Joseph's, Stepton saw flit across the face of the curate, whom he was meeting, a flicker of something like fear. The two men passed each other, and immediately, like one irresistibly compelled, the professor looked back. As he did so, Chichester also turned round to spy upon this unknown. Encountering the gaze of the professor, he started, flushed scarlet, and pursued his way, walking with a quickened step.

The professor went homeward, chuckling.

"To-day's Tuesday," he thought. "By Saturday, at latest, he'll have spoken to me. He'll have to speak to me to relieve the tension of his nerve-ganglions."

Chichester did not wait till Saturday. On Friday afternoon, coming suddenly upon Stepton at a corner, he stopped abruptly, and said:

"May I ask if you want anything of me?"

"Sir!" barked Stepton. "Mr. Chichester!"

"You know my name?" said the curate.

"And probably you know mine—Professor Stepton."

A relief that was evidently intense dawned in the curate's face.

"You are Professor Stepton! You are Mr. Malling's friend!"

"Exactly. Good day."

And the professor marched on.

Chichester did not follow, but the next day, on the pavement not far from the museum, he stopped once more in front of the professor with a "Good afternoon."

"Good day," said Stepton.

"Since you know who I am," began the curate, "and I have heard so much of you, I hope you will forgive me for asking you something."

"Certainly."

"What is it in me which has attracted your attention?"

"I wish I knew," returned the professor.

"You wish you knew! Do you mean that you don't know?"

"I don't know at all."

"But—but—you—I was not wrong in feeling sure that you were—that something in me had aroused your attention?"

"Not wrong at all; but 'something' is not the word."

"What is the word?"

"Everything. Everything in you rouses my attention, Mr. Chichester. But I can't think why."

"Did you know I was Mr. Harding's curate the first time you met me?"

"Yes; I had seen you at St. Joseph's once or twice when I came to hear your rector preach. You did n't interest me at all then, I'm bound to say."

Chichester stood in silence for a minute. Then he said:

"I might walk a little way back with you, if you have no objection."

Stepton jerked his head in assent. And so the acquaintance of these two men was begun. Their first conversation was a delight to the professor. After a short silence the curate said:

"I could not help seeing each time we have met how your attention was fastened upon me."

"Just so," rejoined Stepton, making no apology.

"And I really think," continued Chichester, with a sort of pressure—"I really think I am entitled to ask for some explanation of the matter."

"Certainly you are."

"Well?" He paused, then said again, "Well, Professor Stepton?"

“I’m afraid I’ve nothing to tell you, I like to stick to facts.”

“I only ask you for facts.”

“The facts amount to very little. Coming from the museum I ran across a man. You were the man. My attention was riveted at once. I said to myself, ‘I must see that man again.’ Next day I took my chance. I had luck. You were there at pretty much the same hour.”

I always come from St. Joseph’s—”

“Exactly. And so it’s happened on several days. And that’s all I have to tell you.”

“But surely you can indicate why—”

“No, I can’t. All I can say is that for some reason, quite inexplicable by me, if I had come upon you in a crowd of a thousand, I should have had to attend to you.”

“That’s very strange,” said Chichester, in a low voice; “very strange indeed.”

“There’s a reason for it, of course. There’s a reason for everything, but very often it is n found.” At this point the professor thrust his head toward Chichester, and added, “you can’t tell me the reason, I suppose?”

Chichester looked much startled and taken aback.

“I—oh, no!”

“Then we must get along in the dark and make the best of it.”

Having said this, the professor abruptly dismissed the subject and began to talk of other things. When he chose he could be almost charming. He chose on this occasion. And when at last he hailed a bus, declaring that he was due at home, Chichester expressed a hope that some day he would find himself in Hornton Street, and visit number 4a.

The professor assented, and was carried westward.

Several days passed, but he did not find himself near Horton Street, and he had ceased to visit the South Kensington Museum. Then the curate wrote and invited him to tea. Despite a pretence at indifference in the phraseology of the note, the professor discovered a deep anxiety in the writing. Among other things he had studied, and minutely, graphology.

He sat down and very politely refused the invitation.

Then Chichester came to call on him, and caught him at home.

It was six o’clock in the evening, and the heavens were opened. Agnes, the Scotch parlor-maid who claimed to have second sight, opened the door to Chichester, who, speaking from beneath a dripping umbrella, inquired for the professor.

“He’s in, sir, but he’s busy.”

“Could you take him my card?”

Agnes took it, much to her own surprise, and carried it to the professor’s study.

A gentleman, sir.”

“I told you, Agnes—”

“I could n’t say no to him, sir.”

“Why not? Here!” he took the card.

“Why not?” he repeated, when he had read the name.

“It was n’t in me to, sir.”

“Well, then I shall have to see him. Show him up. But never again will I call you by the proud name of Cerberus.”

So, putting the onus upon Agnes, the professor yielded, murmuring to himself:

“It was n’t in her to! Very expressive! And Cerberus, by the way, was always ready to let ’em in. It was when they wanted to get out that—Good evening. I hope you don’t mind climbing.”

“Thank you, no,” said Chichester.

“Sit down.”

“I am afraid I disturb you.”

“I’m bound to say you do. But what does it matter?”

“As you did n’t find your way to Hornton Street, I thought I would venture.”

“Very good of you. This is a soft chair.”

Chichester sat down. It had been evident to Stepton from the moment when his visitor came in that he was in great agony of mind. There was in his face a sort of still and abject misery which Stepton thought exceedingly promising. As he turned round, leaning his sharp elbow on his writing-table, Stepton was considering how to exploit this misery for the furthering of his purpose.

“I want you to tell me something,” Chichester began. “I want to know why your attention was first attracted to me. I feel sure that you must be able to give a reason. What is it?”

“Well, now, I wish I could,” returned Stepton. To himself he gave the swift admonition,

“Play for hysteria, and see what comes of it.”

“I wish I could; but it’s a mystery to me. But now—let’s see.”

He knitted his heavy brows.

“A long while ago I picked a man out, met him in a crowd, at the Crystal Palace, followed him about, could n’t get away from him. That same evening he was killed on the underground. I read of it in the paper, went to see the body, and there was my man.”

“Do you claim to have some special faculty?” asked Chichester.

“Oh, dear, no. Besides, you have n’t been killed on the underground—yet.”

A curious expression that seemed mingled of disappointment and of contempt passed across Chichester’s face. Stepton saw it and told himself, “No hysteria.”

Possibly the reason may be a more intellectual one,” observed the professor. “I hear you have been preaching some very remarkable sermons. I have n’t heard them. Still, others who have may have ‘suggested’ me. Three quarters of any man’s fame, you know, are due to mere suggestion.”

“You’re not the man to be the prey of that, I fancy—not the easy prey, at any rate.”

“Then we’re left again with no explanation at all, unless, as I believe I hinted once before, you can give us one.”

Chichester looked down; without raising his eyes he presently said in a constrained voice:

“If I were to give you one you might not accept it.”

“Probably not,” said Stepton, briskly. “In my life I’ve been offered a great many explanations, and I’m bound to say I’ve accepted remarkably few.”

Chichester looked up quickly, and with the air of a man nettled.

“You’ll forgive me, I hope, for saying that you scientific men very often seem to have a great contempt for those who are more mystically minded,” he observed.

“I’ve hit the line!” thought Stepton, with a touch of exultation, as he dropped out a negligent, “Forgive you—of course.”

“I dare say it seems to you extraordinary that any man should be able to be a clergyman, genuinely believing what he professes and what he preaches.”

“Very few things seem to me extraordinary.”

“Perhaps because you are skeptical of so much in which others believe.”

“That may be it. Quite likely.”

“And yet isn’t there a saying of Newton’s, ‘A little science sends man far away from God, a great deal of science brings man back to God? You’ll forgive the apparent rudeness. All I mean is—”

“That the sooner I try to get more science the better for me,” snapped out Stepton, brusquely interrupting his visitor, but without heat. “Let me tell you that I pass the greater part of my time in that very effort—to acquire more exact knowledge than I possess. Well—now then! Now then!”

Turning round still more toward the curate he looked almost as if he were about to “square up” to him. A dry aggressiveness informed him, and his voice had a rasping timbre as he continued:

“But I decline to take leaps in the dark like—” Here he mentioned a well-known man of science—“and I decline to reject evidence like—” Here he named a professor even more famous.

The mention of the last name evidently excited Chichester’s curiosity.

“What evidence has he rejected?” he exclaimed.

“Last week he held a sitting to examine the pretensions of Mrs. Groeber, the German medium. Westcott was also present, a man on whose word the very devil—if there is such a person, which I don’t yet know—would rely. Some apparently remarkable phenomena occurred.—” Here he mentioned the professor—“was convinced that they could only have been brought about by supernormal means. Unfortunately, or fortunately, Westcott had seen the trickery which produced them. When the séance was over he explained what it was to . What did this *so-called* man of science do? Refused to accept Westcott’s evidence, clung to his own ridiculous belief,—savage’s fetish belief, nothing more,—and will include the Groeber manifestations as evidence of supernormal powers in his next volume. And I say, I say”—he raised his forefinger—“that clergymen are doing much the same thing pretty nearly every day of their lives. Seek for truth quietly, inexorably, and you may get it; but don’t prod men into falsehood, or try to, as you’ve been trying to in this very room.

“I!” cried out Chichester.

“You. I told you I had no reason to give you as to why you attracted my attention in the street. Were you satisfied with that? Not at all. You must needs come here,—very glad to see you!—and say; ‘I feel sure you must be able to give me a reason. What is it?’ You clamor for a lie. And that’s what men are perpetually doing—clamoring for lies. And they get ’em, from clergymen, from mediums, from so-called scientific men, and from the dear delightful politicians. There now!”

And the professor dropped his forefinger and flung himself back in his chair.

“And”—Chichester in his turn leaned forward, but he spoke with some hesitation—“and suppose I were to tell you a truth, a strange, an amazing truth?”

He paused.

“Go on!” said the professor.

“Wouldn’t you do just the opposite? You say men accept lies. I say you would probably reject truth.”

“*Cela dépend*. What you believed to be truth might not be truth at all. It might be hysteria, it might be nervous dyspepsia, it might be overwork, it might be a dozen things.”

“Just what I say,” exclaimed Chichester. “Men of science delight in nothing so much as in finding excuses for rejecting the greatest truths.”

“Do you mean the greatest truths in the possession of Anglican clergymen?”

“I dare say you think it impossible that a clergyman should know more than a scientific man?”

“Oh, no. But he’s out for faith, and I happen to be out for facts. I like hard facts that can be set down with a fountain-pen in my note-book, and that, taken together, are convincing to all men of reasonable intellect. Very dull, no doubt; but there you have it. Clergymen, as a rule, move in what are called lofty regions—the realms of heart, conscience, and what not. Now, I’m very fond of the region of gray matter—gray matter.”

“And yet you are one of the chief of the investigators in the field of psychical research.”

“Do you think there’s no room for pencil and note-book there? What about Podmore,—there’s a loss!—and a dozen others? Psychic matters have got to be lifted out of the hands of credulous fetish-worshipping fools, and the sooner the better.”

“It’s easy to call people credulous,” said Chichester, with decided heat. “By being so readily contemptuous, Professor Stepton, you may often keep back evidence that might be of inestimable value to your cause. A man in possession of a great truth may keep it to himself for fear of being laughed at or called a liar.”

“Then all I can say is that he’s a coward—an arrant abject coward.”

Chichester sat in silence. Again he was looking down. Now that his eyes were hidden by their drooping lids, and that he was no longer speaking, the sadness of his aspect seemed more profound. It dignified his rather insignificant features. It even seemed, in some mysterious way, to infuse power into his slight and unimportant figure. After sitting thus for perhaps three minutes he raised his head and got up from his chair.

“I must not take up your time any longer,” he said. “It was very good of you to see me at all.” He held out his hand, which Stepton took, and added, “I’ll just say one thing.”

“Do!”

“It is n’t always cowardice which causes a man to keep a secret—a secret which might be of value to the world.”

“I never said it was.”

“No; but still—you spoke just now of my sermons. I preached one not very long ago which I have typed myself. If I send it to you do you think you could find time to read it?”

“Certainly.”

“I will send it, then. Good night.”

“I’ll come down with you.”

The professor let Chichester out. The rain was still falling in torrents. Shrouded in his mackintosh, protected by his umbrella, the curate walked away. Looking after him, Stepton thought:

“Very odd! It is n’t only in the face. Even the figure, all covered up and umbrella-roofed, seems to have something—he’ll send me the sermon of the man and his double to-morrow.”

And on the morrow that sermon came by the first post. Having read it, the professor promptly returned it to Chichester with the following note:

The White House, Westminster.

Dear Mr. Chichester:

Very glad to have had the opportunity of reading your interesting discourse. If I had not known it was yours, and a sermon, I should have said “a posthumous work of Robert Louis Stevenson.” It does credit to your imagination. If you care to publish, I should suggest “The Cornhill.” I know nothing about their terms.

Yours faithfully,
G. R. E. Stepton.

By return of post there came an urgent invitation to the professor to visit Chichester's rooms in Hornton Street, "to continue a discussion which has a special interest for me at this moment."

"Discussion!" thought Stepton, sitting down to accept. "What my man wants is for me to goad him into revelation; and I'll do it."

The professor knew enough of psychology to be aware that in the very depths of the human heart there is a desire which may perhaps be called socialistic—the desire to share truth with one's fellow-men. Chichester was scourged by this desire. But whether what he wished to share was truth, or only what he believed to be truth, was the question. Anyhow, Stepton was determined to make him speak. And he set off to Hornton Street little doubting that he would find means to carry his determination into effect.

He arrived about half-past five. He did not turn the corner into Kensington High Street on his homeward way until darkness had fallen, having passed through some of the most extraordinary moments that had ever been his.

When he was shown into the curate's sitting-room, his first remark was:

"Sent that very interesting story to 'The Corn-hill' yet?"

"I don't think you quite understand, Professor," replied Chichester. "I did not type it with a view to sending it in anywhere for publication. You'll have tea with me, I hope? Here it is, all ready."

"Thank you."

"Oh, Ellen!"

Chichester went to the door, and Stepton heard the words, "Nobody, you understand," following on a subdued murmuring.

"And Mr. Harding, sir?" said the maid's voice outside.

"Mr. Harding won't come to-day. That will do, Ellen."

The professor heard steps descending. His host shut the door and returned.

"You typed it for your own use?" said Stepton.

"That sermon? Yes. I wished to keep it by me as a record."

He sat down, and poured out the tea.

"A record of an imagined experience. Exactly. Then why not publish?"

"It is not fiction."

"Well, it is n't fact."

The professor drank his tea, looking at his host narrowly over the cup.

"Do you say such an experience as that described in my sermon is impossible?"

"Do you say it is possible?"

"If I were to say so would you believe me? "

"Certainly not, unless I could make an investigation and personally satisfy myself that what you said was true. You would n't expect anything else, I'm sure."

"You can believe nothing on the mere word of another?"

"Very little. I am an investigator. I look for proof."

"With your pencil in one hand, your note-book in the other."

In Chichester's last remark there was a note of sarcasm which thoroughly roused Stepton, for it sounded like the sarcasm of knowledge addressed to ignorance. Stepton had a temper. This touch of superiority, not vulgar, but very definite, fell on it like a lash.

"Now I'll go for the reverend gentleman of St. Joseph's!" he thought.

And for a moment he forgot his aim in remembering himself. Afterward, in thinking matters over, he offered a pinch of incense at the altar of his egoism.

“So, the modern clergyman still believes in slip-slop, does he?” he exclaimed in his most aggressive manner. “Even now has n’t he learnt the value of the matter-of-fact? The clergyman is the doctor of the soul, is n’t he? And the doctor, is n’t he the clergyman of the body? I wonder, I do wonder, how long the average doctor would keep together his practice if he worked with no more precision than the average clergyman. The contempt of the pencil and note-book! The contempt of proper care in getting together and coordinating facts! The contempt of proof—the appeal to reason! And so we get to the contempt of reason. And let me tell you—” he struck the tea-table with his lean hand till the curate’s cups jumped—“that scarcely ever have I heard a sermon in which was not to be found somewhere the preacher’s contempt for reason, the bread of the intellect of man.”

The soul is not the intellect.” “Don’t you think it higher?” “I do.”

“And so you put it on slops!”

The professor got up from his chair, and began to sidle up and down the small room.

“You put it on slops, as if it were a thing with a disordered stomach. That’s your way of showing it respect. You approach the shrine with an offering of water gruel. Now look ye here!”—The professor paused beside the tea-table—“The soul wants its bread, depends upon it, as much as the body, and the church that is free with the loaves is the church to get a real hold on real men. Flummery is no good to anybody. Rhetoric’s no good to anybody. Claptrap and slipslop only make heads swim and stomachs turn. The pencil and note-book, observation and the taking down of it, these bring knowledge to the doors of men. And when you sneer at them, you sneer at bread, on the eating of which—or its equivalent, basis-nourishment—life depends.”

“I wonder whether you, and such as you, really know on what the true life of the soul depends,” said Chichester, with an almost dreadful quietness.

The professor sat down again.

“Such as I?” he said. “You are good enough to do me the honor of putting me in a class?”

“As you have so far honored me,” returned Chichester.

“Ha!” ejaculated Stepton.

He had quite got the better of his egoism, but he by no means regretted his outburst.

“Do you claim to stand outside the ranks of the clergy?” he asked.

“Do you claim to stand outside the ranks of the scientists?”

“Oh, dear, no. And now—you?”

Chichester said nothing for a moment. Then, lifting up his head, and gazing at the professor with a sort of sternness of determination, he said:

“Remember this! You yourself told me that in a crowd of a thousand you must have fixed your attention on me.”

For a moment the professor had it in his mind to say that this statement of his had been a lie invented to make an impression on Chichester. But he resisted the temptation to score—and lose. He preferred not to score, and to win, if possible.

“I did,” he said.

“Could this be so if I were like other men, other clergymen?”

“Well, then, what is the mighty difference between you and your reverend brethren—between you, let us say, and your rector, Mr. Harding?”

Very casually and jerkily the professor threw out this question.

Not casually did Chichester receive it. He moved almost like a man who had been unexpectedly struck, then seemed to recover himself, and to nerve himself for some ordeal. Leaning forward, and holding the edge of the table with one hand, he said:

“How well do you know Hr. Harding?”

“Pretty well. Not intimately.”

“You have seen him since he—altered?”

“I saw him only the other day when I was at a specialist’s in Harley Street.”

“A specialist’s?”

“For nervous dyspepsia.”

Again the look of contempt flickered over Chichester’s face.

“Do you think the alteration in Mr. Harding may be due to nervous dyspepsia?”

“Probably. There are few maladies that so sap the self-confidence of a man.”

Chichester laughed.

For the first time since he had entered the little room the professor felt a cold sensation of creeping uneasiness.

“Apparently you don’t agree with me,” he said.

“I am not a doctor, and I know very little about that matter.”

“Then I’m bound to say I don’t know what you find to laugh at.”

“For a man who has spent so much time in psychical research you seem to have a rather material outlook upon—”

“Mr. Harding?”

“And all that he represents.”

“Suppose we stick to Mr. Harding,” said the professor, grittily. “He is typical enough, even if you are not.”

“In what respect do you consider Mr. Harding typical?”

“I am speaking of the Harding before the fall into the abysses of nervous dyspepsia.”

“Very well. In what respects was Mr. Harding typical?”

“In the sublime self-confidence with which he proclaimed as facts, things that have never been proved to be facts.”

“Do men want facts?” said Chichester, almost as one speaking alone to himself.

“I do. I want nothing else. Possibly Mr. Harding had none to give me. I don’t blame him.”

“Perhaps it is a greater thing to give men faith than to give them facts.”

“Give them the first by giving them the second, if you can! And that, by the way, is the last thing the average clergyman is able to do.”

Chichester sat silent for nearly a minute looking at the professor with a strange expression, almost fiery, yet meditative, as if he were trying to appraise him, were weighing him in a balance.

Professor,” he said at last, “ I suppose your passion for facts has led men to put a great deal of faith in you. Has n’t it?”

“I dare say my word carries some weight. I really don’t know,” responded Stepton, with an odd hint of something like modesty.

“I had thought of Malling first,” almost murmured Chichester.

“What’s that about Malling?”

“I think he would have accepted what I have to give more readily than you would. There seems to me something in him which stretches out arms toward those things in which mystics believe. In you there seems to me something which would almost rather repel such things.”

“I beg your pardon. I am quiescent. I neither seek to summon nor to repel.”

“I could n’t tell Malling,” said Chichester. “His readiness stopped me. It struck me like a blow.”

Malling prides himself on being severely neutral in mind.”

“And you on being skeptical?”

“I await facts.”

“Shall I give you some strange facts, the strangest perhaps you have ever met with?”

Stepton smiled dryly.

“You’ll forgive me, but some such remark has been the prelude to so many figments.”

“Figments?”

“Of the imagination.”

An expression of anger—almost like a noble anger it seemed—transformed Chichester’s face. It was as a fine wrath which looked down from a height, and in an instant it melted into pity.

“How much you must have missed because of your skepticism!” he said. “But I shall not let it affect me. You are a man of note-book and pencil. Will you promise me one thing? Will you give me your word not to share what I shall tell you with any one, unless, later on, I am willing that you should?”

“Oh, dear, yes!” said the professor.

And again he smiled. For even now he believed the curate to be wavering, swayed by conflicting emotions, and felt sure that a flick of the whip to his egoism would be likely to hasten the coming of what he, the professor, wanted.

A loud call rose up from the street. A wandering vender of something was crying his ware. In his voice was a sound of fierce melancholy. Chichester went to the window and shut it down.

“I wish it was night,” he said as he turned.

The professor jerked out his watch.

“It must be getting late,” he observed. “Past six! by Jove!”

He made an abrupt movement.

“What?” said Chichester. “You are going!”

He came up to the table.

“Sometimes I think,” he said, “that men hate and dread nothing as they hate and dread facts which may upset the theories they cherish.”

“You’re perfectly right. Well, very glad to have seen you in your own room.” The professor got up. “By their rooms shall ye know them.” He glanced round.

“Ah, I see you have Rossetti’s delightfully anemic Madonna, and Holman Hunt’s ‘Light of the World.’ A day or two ago I was talking to a lady who pronounced that—” he extended his finger toward the Hunt—“the greatest work of art produced in the last hundred years. Her reason? Its comforting quality. I am sure you agree with her. Good-by.”

He made a sidling movement toward the door. Perhaps it was that movement which finally decided the curate to speak.

“Professor,” he said, “I don’t want you to go yet.”

“Why not?” jerked out Stepton, with one hand on the door-knob.

“You collect ‘cases.’ I have a case for you. You are a skeptic: you say men should be brought to faith by facts. Sit down. I will give you some facts.”

The professor came slowly back, looking dry and cold, and sat down by the table, facing the Rossetti Madonna.

“Always ready for facts,” he said.

“You have heard of doubles, of course, Professor?” said Chichester, leaning his arms on the table and putting his hands one against the other, as if making a physical effort to be very calm.

“Of course. There was an account of one in that sermon of yours.”

“Have you ever seen a double?”

“No; not to my knowledge.”

“I suppose you disbelieve in them?”

“I have no reason to believe in them. I have not collected enough evidence to convince me that there are such manifestations.”

“You know a double at this moment.”

“Do I, indeed? And may I ask the manifestation’s name?”

“Marcus Harding.”

“Marcus Harding is a double, you say. Whose?”

“Mine,” said Chichester in a low voice. He clasped and unclasped his hands.

“I don’t understand you,” said Stepton, rather disdainfully.

“I will try to make you.” And Chichester began to speak, at first in a low, level voice. “That sermon of mine,” he said, “was a sort of shadow of a truth that I wanted to reveal,—that I dared not fully reveal. Already I had tried to tell Evelyn Malling something of it. I had failed. When the moment came, when Malling was actually before me, I could not speak out. His mind was trying to track the truth that was in me. He got, as it were, upon the trail. Once he even struck into the truth. Then he went away to Marcus Harding. I remained in London. ‘When I knew that those two were together I felt a sort of jealous fear of Malling. For there was pity in him. Despite his intense curiosity he had a capacity for pity. I realized that it might possibly interfere with—something that I was doing. And I recalled Marcus Harding to London. From that moment I have avoided Malling. I could never tell him. But you, hard searcher after truth as you are—you could never find it in you to drag away another from the contemplation of truth. Could you? Could you?’”

“Probably not,” said Stepton. “I usually let folks alone even when they’re glaring at falsehood. Ha!”

He settled himself in his chair, looking sidewise toward Chichester.

“You, like every one else, have noticed the tremendous change in Marcus Harding,” Chichester went on. “That change, the whole of that change, is solely owing to me.”

“Very glad to have your explanation of that.”

“I am going to give it you. The beginning of that change came about through the action of Marcus Harding. He wished for facts that are, perhaps,—indeed, probably,—withheld deliberately from the cognizance of man. You have sneered at those who live by faith, you have sneered at priests. Well, you can let that Marcus Harding go free of your sarcasm. Although a clergyman he was not a faithful man. And he wanted facts to convince him that there was a life beyond the grave. Henry Chichester—”

“You! You!” interjected Stepton, harshly.

“I, then, came into his life. He thought he would use me to further his purpose. He constrained me to sittings such as you have often taken part in, with a view to sending me into a trance and employing me, when in that condition, as a means of communication with the other world—if there was one. We sat secretly in this room, at this table.”

“You need not give me ordinary details of your sittings,” said the professor. “I am familiar with them, of course.”

“Henry Chichester—”

“You! You! Don’t complicate matters!”

“I never was entranced; but presently I felt myself changing subtly.”

“People very often imagine they are developing into something wonderful at seances. Nothing new in that.”

“Please try to realize the facts of my case without assuming that it resembles a thousand others. I believe, I feel sure, that it resembles no other case that has come under your observation. To grasp it you must grasp the characters of two men, Marcus Harding as he was—and myself, as I was.”

“Put them before me, then.”

“That Marcus Harding you knew. He was the type of the man who, sublimely self-confident, imposes his view of himself upon other men and especially upon women. He had strength—strength of body and strength of mind. And he had the strength which a devouring ambition sheds through a man. A fine type of the worldly clergyman he was, of the ardent climber up the ladder of preferment. To him the church was a career, and he meant to succeed in it. If he had to begin as a curate he meant to end as a bishop, perhaps as an archbishop. And he had will to help him, and vitality to help him, and the sort of talent that brings quick notice on a man. And he had also a woman to help him, his wife, Lady Sophia. He chose well when he chose her for his helpmate, though he may not think so now. He should have been content with what he had. But he wanted more, and he thought he might perhaps get what he wanted through me. Marcus Harding was a full-blooded type of the clerical autocrat. I once was an equally complete type of the clerical slave—slave to conscience, slave to humble-mindedness, slave to my rector as soon as I knew him.

“St. Francis of Assisi was the character I worshiped. I strove after simple goodness. I desired no glories of this world, no praises of men. I did not wish to be clever or to shine, but only to do my duty to my fellow-men, and so toward God. When I was first to make the acquaintance of Marcus Harding, with a view to becoming his senior curate if he thought fit, I felt some alarm. I had heard so much of his great energy and his remarkable talents. The day came. I paid my visit to Onslow Gardens. For the first time I saw—” Chichester paused. His face became distorted. He turned toward the window as if anxious to hide his face from the professor’s small, keen eyes. “I saw—that man,” he continued, in a withdrawn and husky voice, and still looking away.

Stepton sat motionless and silent, sidewise, with his arms hanging.

Chichester, after another long pause, again faced him.

“My very first impression was unfavorable. I attributed this to his great size, which had startled me. I now know I was wrong in thinking I took that impression from the outer man. It was the inner man who in that moment announced himself to me. But almost instantly he had surely withdrawn himself very far away, and I, then, had no means of following him. So he escaped from me, and I fell under the influence that Marcus Harding was able to exert at will.

“I was dominated. Buoyancy, life, energy, self-confidence, radiated from that man. He steeped me in his vigor. He seemed kind, cordial. He won my heart. My intellect, of course, was dazzled. But—he won my heart. And I felt not only, ‘Here is a man far greater than myself to whom I can look up,’ but also, ‘Here is a man to whom I must look up, because he is far better than myself.’ At that interview it was settled that I should become senior curate at St. Joseph’s.

“As you know, I became, and still am, senior curate. As I grew to know Marcus Harding better I admired him more. In fact, my feeling for him was something greater than admiration. I almost worshiped him. His will was law to me in everything. His slightest wish I regarded as a behest. His talents amazed me. But I thought him not only the cleverest, but the best of men. It seemed

to me right that such a man should be autocratic. A beneficent autocracy became my ideal of government. That my rector's will should be law to his wife, his servants, his curates, his organist, his choir, to those attached to his schools, to those who benefited by the charities he organized, seemed to me more than right and proper. I could have wished to see it law to all the world. If any one ventured to question any decision of his, or to speak a word against him, I felt almost hot with anger. In a word, I was at his feet, as the small and humble-minded man often is at the feet of the man who has talents and who is gifted with ambition and supreme self-confidence.

"For a long time this condition of things continued, and I was happy in it. Probably it might have continued till now, if—if that accursed idea had not come to Marcus Harding."

Again Chichester paused. In speaking he had evidently become gradually less aware of his companion's presence and personality. His subject had gripped him. Memory had grown warm within him. He lived in the days that were past.

"That accursed idea," he repeated slowly, "to use me as his tool in an endeavor to break down the barrier which divides men from the other world.

"As I told you, we began to sit secretly. Marcus Harding wished me to fall into the entranced condition. I did not know this at first, so at first I did not consciously resist his desire. He had told me a lie. He had told me that he desired only one thing in our sittings, to give to me something of the will power that made him a force in the world. He had declared that this was possible. I believed him unquestioningly. I thought he was trying to send some of his power into me. Soon I felt that he was succeeding in this supposed endeavor. Soon I felt that a strange new power was filtering into me.

Chichester fixed his eyes on Stepton as he said the last words, and seemed to emerge from his former condition of self-absorption.

"You have sat often. Have you ever felt such a sensation? It is like growth," he said.

"When one first begins to sit at seances, one is apt to imagine all sorts of things in the darkness," returned Stepton. "I dare say I did, like other folk."

"I understand," said Chichester, with a sort of strange condescension. "You think I was merely the victim of absurdity. The sense of this coming of power grew slowly, but steadily, within me. And presently it was complicated by another development, which involved—or began to involve, let me say at this point—my companion, Marcus Harding. I think I ought to tell you that in beginning the sittings I had had certain doubts, which were swept away by my admiration of, and faith in, my rector. Hitherto I had always thought that our human knowledge was deliberately limited by God, and that it was very wrong to strive to know too much. The man of science no doubt believes that it is impossible to know too much; but I have thought that many great truths are kept from us because we are not yet in a condition properly to understand them. I had, therefore, begun these practices with a certain tremor, and possibly a certain feeling of resistance, in the depths of my soul. As I felt the power coming to me I had put away my fears. They did not return. Yet surely the new development within me, of which I now became aware, was connected with those fears, however subtly. It was a sensation almost of hostility directed against Marcus Harding."

"Ah, now!" ejaculated the professor, as if in despite of himself. "And where's the connection you speak of?"

"Marcus Harding had constrained me to do a thing that in my soul I had believed to be wrong and that had roused my fear. As power dawned in me, directing itself upon everything about me,

it was instinctively hostile to him who had dominated me before I had any power, and who, by dominating me, had for a moment made me afraid.”

Retrospective enmity! Very well!” muttered the professor. “I understand you. Keep on!”

“This hostility—if I may call a feeling at first not very definite by so definite a name—induced in me a critical attitude of mind. I found myself, to my surprise, secretly criticizing the man whom till now I had regarded as altogether beyond the reach of criticism. I felt that Marcus Harding was giving me power. I was grateful to him for doing so; yet I began to see him in a new, and at moments ‘an unpleasant light. Presently, after trying in vain to combat this novel sensation, which seemed to me almost treacherous, almost disloyal, I sought about for a reason, to give myself at least some justification for it. I sought, and one night it seemed to me that I found.

“On that night I was more than ever aware that strength of some kind was pouring into me. I had an almost heady sensation, such as one who drinks a generous wine may experience. When we rose from the table I told my rector so. He stared at me very strangely. Then he said: ‘Good! Good! Did n’t I tell you I would give you some of my power?’ He paused. Then he added: ‘It will come! It must come!’ As he spoke the last words he frowned, and all his face seemed to harden, as if he were making a violent mental effort to which the body was obliged to respond. And at that instant I was aware that the reason Marcus Harding had given to me to persuade me to these sittings was not the true one, that his purpose was quite other than that which I had hitherto supposed it to be. I was suddenly aware of this, and I thought: ‘I must already have been aware of it subconsciously, and that accounts for my sensation of hostility toward the rector.’ A lie had been told to me. My new self-confidence resented this; and I said to myself, ‘If Marcus Harding can tell a lie to me, who almost worshiped him, he must be an arrant hypocrite.’

“We sat again, and again I knew that there was something in the mind of my companion which he concealed from me, something to which I should strongly object if I knew what it was, something which troubled the atmosphere, the mental atmosphere, of the sitting. Instead of being in accord, we were engaged in a silent, but violent, struggle. I was determined not to be overcome. A sort of fierce desire for tyranny sprang up in me. I longed to see Marcus Harding at my feet.

“Again and again we sat. My hostile feeling grew. My critical feeling grew. My longing to tyrannize increased, till I was almost afraid of it, so cruel did I feel it to be. ‘Down! Down under my feet!’ That was what my soul was secretly saying now to the man whose will had been as law to me. And one night, as if he heard that ugly voice of my soul, he abruptly got up from the table and said: ‘It seems to me that you and I are not *en rapport*. It seems to me that no more good can come of these sittings. We had better not sit again.’

“We must sit again,” I replied.

“Marcus Harding turned scarlet with anger. He looked at me. He opened his lips to speak. I let him speak. I even argued the question with him. I pointed out to him that his only design—the only design acknowledged by him, at any rate, in beginning these practices—had been to give me strength such as, he had declared to me, he himself had drawn while at Oxford from a Hindu comrade. In carrying out this design, I now told him, he was being successful. I felt that I was growing in power of will, in self-confidence. How, then, could he refuse to continue when success was already in sight? ‘Unless,’ I concluded, ‘you had some other design in persuading me to sit, which I did in the first instance against my secret desire, and you feel that there is now no probability of carrying that design into effect.’

“He gave in. I had him beaten. Hastily he muttered a good-night and left me. I let him out into the night. As soon as the street door had shut on him I ran upstairs. I went to that window,—” Chichester flung out his hand—“pushed it up, leaned out, and watched him down the street. I saw him pass under a gas-lamp and I said to myself: ‘You have submitted to my will, and you shall submit again. I am the master now.’”

“In that moment all the domination which I had so joyously endured, which I had even surely reveled in,—for there are those who can revel in their slavery,—abruptly became in my mind a reason for revenge. Marcus Harding disappeared in the night; but still I leaned out, staring down the way he had gone, and thinking, ‘You shall pay me back for it. You shall pay me back.’”

“From that night I made no effort to check the critical faculty, the exercise of which at first had seemed to me a sort of treachery. And as I let myself criticize, I saw more clearly. The scales fell from my eyes. I realized that I had been nothing less than blind in regard to Marcus Harding. I saw him now as he was, a victim of egomania, a worldling, tyrannical, falsely sentimental, and unfaithful steward, a liar—perhaps even an unbeliever. His whole desire—I knew it now—was not to be good, but to be successful. His charity, his pity for the poor, his generosity, his care for his church, for his schools—all was pretence. I saw Marcus Harding as he was. And what followed?”

Chichester leaned forward to the professor.

“Fear followed,” he said in a withdrawn voice. Fear!” said Stepton, clearing his throat with a loud, rasping noise.

“Whenever I was with Marcus Harding in any public place I was now companioned by fear. I dreaded unspeakably lest others should begin to see what I saw. When he preached, I could hardly sit to listen: I felt as if any shame falling upon him would overwhelm me also. I strove in vain to combat this strange, this, then, inexplicable sensation. With every sitting this terror grew upon me. It tortured me. It obsessed me. It drove me into action. When I was with my rector, I tried perpetually to prevent him from exposing his true self to the world, by changing the conversation, by attenuating his remarks, by covering up his actions with my own, sometimes even by a brusque interruption. But in the pulpit he escaped from me. I was forced to sit silent and to listen while he preached doctrine in which he had no belief, and put forward theories of salvation, redemption by faith, and the like, which meant less than nothing to him. Finding this presently unendurable by me, I strove to govern him mentally when he was in the pulpit, to track him, as it were, with my mind, to head him off with my mind when he was beginning to take the wrong path.”

“Did you succeed in that effort?” interrupted the professor.

I made an impression, a terrible impression, upon him. I almost broke him down. I sapped his self-confidence. His power as a preacher deserted him, as his power outside the pulpit deserted him. ‘With every day I felt that I saw more clearly into every recess, every cranny, of his mind and nature. Just at first this frightfully clear sight was mine only when we were sitting; but presently it was mine whenever I was with him. And he knew it, and went in fear of me. Gradually, very gradually, it came about that our former positions were reversed; for as he sank down in the human scale, I mounted. As he lost in power, I gained. And especially in the pulpit I felt that now I had force, that I could grip my hearers, could make a mighty impression upon those with whom I was brought into contact.

“But I must tell you that now I gained no satisfaction from my own improvement, if so it may be called. My whole life was vitiated by my secret terror lest Marcus Harding should be found

out, should ever be known for what he was. His actions, and even his thoughts, affected me with an intimacy that was inexplicable.”

“You were in telepathic communication with him!” interjected Stepton.

“Call it so if you like. Often I felt what he was thinking, almost as if each thought of his were a hand laid upon me—a hand from which I shrank with an almost trembling repugnance. Sometimes when he thought something contemptible or evil, I shrank as if from a blow.

“There was a link between us. Presently, soon, I knew it. We seemed in some dreadful way to belong to each other, so that whatever was thought, said, done by him, whatever happened to him, reacted upon me.

“At this time Lady Sophia Harding hated me with a deadly hatred. Formerly she had been indifferent to me. Concentrated upon her husband, adoring him, vain of him, greedily ambitious for his advancement, she had had no time to bestow on a clerical nonentity. But as I grew to understand what her husband really was she grew to hate me. She was almost rude to me. She spoke ill of me behind my back. She even tried to oust me from my position as senior curate of St. Joseph’s. Why did not she succeed? Are you thinking that?”

“Well, what if I was?” snapped the professor, moving in his chair.

“Marcus Harding could not make a move to get rid of me. There was a link between us which he could not even try to break.

“One night—one night—I discovered what that link was.”

It was growing dark in the room. The Rossetti Madonna, thin, anemic, with hanging hair, seemed fading away on the somber, green wall. The window-panes looked spectral and white. The faint murmur of the city sounded a little deeper and much sadder than in the light of day. Stepton was aware of a furtive but strong desire for artificial light in the room, but he did not choose to mention it. And Chichester, whose voice—so it seemed to his hearer—began to have that peculiar almost alarming timbre which belongs to a voice speaking not for the ears of another, but for the satisfaction only of the soul which it expresses, continued his narrative, or confession, as if unaware of the dying of day.

“During the day which preceded it I had been haunted by the thought of myself doing what Marcus Harding could not do. Why should not I of my own will leave St. Joseph’s, get away from this dreadful contemplation which obsessed me, from this continual anxiety—almost amounting to terror at moments—which gnawed me? Why should not I break this mysterious link, impalpable yet strong? If I did, should I not again find peace? But my sittings with Marcus Harding would be at an end. Could I give them up? I asked myself that, and I felt as if I could not. Through them, by means of them, I felt as if I might attain to something wonderful—terrible perhaps, but wonderful. I felt as if I were approaching the threshold of absolute truth. A voice within me whispered, ‘Go no further.’ Was it the voice of conscience? I did not heed it. Something irresistible urged me forward. I thrust away from me with a sort of crude mental violence the haunting thought. And when the darkness came I greeted it.

“For he came with the darkness.”

On the wall opposite to the professor the thin Madonna faded away.

“As I heard his heavy step on the stairs that night I said to myself, ‘At all hazards I will see, I will know, more. I will see, I will know—all.’ When he entered at that door”—a thin darkness moved in the darkness as Chichester pointed—“he was dreadfully white and looked sad, almost terrified. He suggested that we should break through our plan and not sit. I refused. He then said he wished to sit in light. I refused. He was become my creature. He dared not disobey my desires. We placed our hands on this table, not touching. I could no longer endure the touch of

his hand. We remained motionless. A long time passed. There were no rappings. A strange deadness seemed to prevail in the room. Presently it faded away, and I had the sensation that I was sitting quite alone.

“At first it seemed to me that my companion must have crept out of the room silently, leaving me by myself in the darkness. I shuddered at the thought that I was alone. But then I said to myself that Marcus Harding must be there in the blackness opposite to me, and I moved my hands furtively on the table, thinking to prove his presence to myself by touch. I did not prove it. Suddenly I had no need to touch him in order to know that he was there.”

“Why not?” said the professor, and started at the sound of his own voice in the little room.

“Something made me realize that he was still within the room. Nevertheless, I felt that I was alone. How could that be? I asked myself that question. This answer came as it were sluggishly into my mind, ‘You are alone not because Marcus Harding is away, but because Henry Chichester is away.’ For a long while I sat there stagnantly dwelling on this knowledge which had come to me in the blackness. It was as if I knew without understanding, as a man may know he is involved in a catastrophe without realizing how it has affected his own fate. And then slowly there came to me, or grew in me, an understanding of how I was alone. I was alone with Marcus Harding at that moment because I was Marcus Harding. A shutter seemed to slide back softly, and for the first time I, Marcus Harding, stared upon myself out of the body of another man, of Henry Chichester. I was alone with my soul double. Motionless, silent, I gazed upon it. Now I understood why I had been tortured with anxiety lest the world should learn to comprehend Marcus Harding as I comprehended him. Now I understood why neither he nor I had been able to break that mysterious link which our sittings had forged between us. I had been trying ignorantly to protect myself, to conceal my own shortcomings, to cover my own nakedness. I had sweated with fear lest my own truth should be discovered by all those to whom for so many years I had been presenting a lie. Yes, I had sweated with fear; but even then how little I had known! A voice cried out suddenly, ‘Turn on the light!’ It was the voice of my double. It seemed to awake, or to recall perhaps,—how can I say?—Henry Chichester. I was aware of a shock; it seemed strongly physical. I got up at once and turned the light on. Marcus Harding was before me, trembling, ashen. ‘What is it? What has happened?’ he said in a broken voice. I made no reply. He left me. I heard his step in the street—out there!”

Chichester was silent. The professor said nothing for a moment, but passed his tongue twice over his lips and swallowed, sighing immediately afterward.

“Transferred personality!” he muttered—“transferred personality. Is that what you’d have me believe?”

“I’ll tell you the rest. When Marcus Harding’s steps died away down the street I remained here. Since that shock I have spoken of, I felt that I was again Henry Chichester, changed, as I had long been changed—charged with new force, new knowledge, new discrimination, new power over others, gifted with a penetrating vision into the very soul of the man I had worshiped, yet Henry Chichester. And as Henry Chichester I suffered; I condemned myself. This I said to myself that night, ‘I was determined to see. I disregarded the voice within me which warned me that I was treading a forbidden path. God has punished me. He has allowed me to see. But this shall be the end. I will never sit again. I will give up my curacy. I will leave St. Joseph’s at once. Never more will I set eyes on Marcus Harding.’ I was in a condition of fierce excitement—”

“Ah, exactly,” muttered the professor, almost as if consoled—“fierce excitement!”

“I could not think of sleep. For a long time I remained in here, sitting, standing, pacing, opening books; I scarcely know what I did or did not do. At last a sensation of terrible

exhaustion crept over me. I undressed. I threw myself on my bed. I tried to sleep. I turned, shifted, got up, let in more air, again lay down, lay resolutely still in the dark, tried not to think. But always my mind dwelt on that matter. In those few frightful moments what had become of myself, of Henry Chichester? Had the powerful personality of that man whom once I had almost worshiped thrust him away, submerged him, stricken him down in a sort of deathlike trance? What I had seen I remembered now as Henry Chichester. 'What I had known in those moments I still knew now as Henry Chichester. In vain I revolved this matter in my feverish mind. It was too much for me. I was in deep waters.

"I closed my eyes. The fatigue wrapped me more closely. Sleep at last was surely drawing near. But suddenly I knew—how I cannot exactly say—that once more the shutter was to be drawn back for me. This knowledge resembled a horrible physical sensation. The entry of it into my mind, or indeed into my very soul, was as the dawning of a dreadful and unnatural pain in the body. This pain increased till it became agony. Although I still lay motionless, I felt like one involved in a furious struggle in which the whole sum of me took violent part. And there came to me the simile of a man seized by tremendous hands, and held before a window opening into a room in which something frightful was about to take place. And the shutter slipped back from the window.

"Again I looked upon myself. That was my exact sensation. The shutter drawn back, I assisted at the spectacle of Marcus Harding's life. And it was my life. I knew with such frightful intimacy that my knowledge was as vision. Therefore, I say, I saw. Not only my spirit seemed to be gazing, but also my bodily eyes.

"I saw myself in the night slowly approaching my house in Onslow Gardens, ashen pale, shaken, terrified. At a corner I passed a policeman. He knew me and saluted me with respect. I made no gesture in response. He stared at me in surprise. Then a smile came into his face—the smile of a man who is suddenly able to think much less of another than he thought before. I left him smiling thus, reached my house, and stood before it.

"Now I must tell you, and I rely absolutely on your regarding this as said in the strictest, most inviolable confidence—"

"Certainly. Word of honor, and so forth!" said the professor, quickly and sharply.

"I must tell you that Marcus Harding is a sinner, and not merely in the sense in which all men are sinners. There have been recurring moments in his life when he has committed actions which, if publicly known, would ruin him in the eyes of the world and put an end to his career. As I looked at myself standing before my house, I saw that I was hesitating whether to go in with my misery, or whether to seek for it the hideous alleviation of my beloved sin.

"Professor,"—it seemed to Stepton at this moment, as if Chichester's voice loomed upon him out of the darkness by which they were now enshrouded,—“it has been said that nothing shocks a man so terribly as the sight of his body-double; that to see what appears to be himself, even if only standing at a window or sitting before a fire, causes in a man a physical horror which seems to strike to the very roots of his physical being. I looked now upon my soul-double, piercing the fleshly envelop, and it was my very soul that sweated and turned cold. For I perceived the dreadful action which, if known, would certainly ruin me, being committed by the spirit. The slavish body had not yet bowed down and done its part; but it was about to obey the impulse of the spirit. Slowly the body turned away from its home. The spirit was driving it. The demon with the whip was at work in the night. I looked till the dawn came. And only when at last my double crept, like a thief, into its house, did sleep take me for a little while—sleep that was alive with nightmare.”

Chichester was silent. The professor heard him breathing quickly, saw him, almost as a shadow just shown by the faint light that entered from the street through the two small windows, clasp and unclasp his hands, touch his forehead, his eyelids, move in his chair, like a man profoundly stirred and unable to be at ease.

“When I woke,” he continued, after a long pause, which the professor did not break by a word or a movement, “I woke to combat. As I told you, I had resolved at once to resign my curacy, and never to see that man again. In the light of the morning I sat down to write my letter of resignation; but I could not do it. A fearful compulsion to remain was upon me. I wrote a few words. I stopped, tore the note up, began again. But writing was impossible. Then I resolved to visit Marcus Harding and to tell him that I must go. I went to his house. He was at home. When I saw him I told him that I wished him to sit again that night. He strove to refuse. He did not understand the truth, but he was terrified. I ordered him to come to my rooms that night, and left him. As I was going away I met Lady Sophia. To my amazement, she stopped me, spoke to me kindly, even more than kindly, looked at me with an expression in her eyes that almost frightened me. I said to myself, ‘But those are a slave’s eyes!’ as I left her. Never before had any woman looked at me like that. In that moment, I think, she began to turn from him toward me, to forsake weakness for strength. Yes, I say strength. I was rent by the tumult within me, but I had strength. I have it now. For, despite his hypocrisy, his unbelief, his active sinning, Marcus Harding had been a strong man. And even Henry Chichester, with all his humbleness, his readiness to yield to others, to think nothing of himself, had had the strength that belongs to purity of soul. And then there is the strength the soul draws from looking upon truth. There was strength, there is now, for the woman to follow. And instinct has surely guided her. She does not, she cannot know. And yet instinct sends her in search of the strength.”

“What do you mean by that? What do you claim?”

“You read that sermon?”

“I did.”

“Don’t you understand? I am that man at the window. He did not flee away. He could not. He was, he is, compelled to remain. He watches that dreadful life. And the other within the room is fading. The strength, the authority, the power, are coming to me. Every sitting broadens that bridge across which the deserters are passing. When I preached that sermon my congregation sat as if numbed by terror. And he in the choir listened, never moving. I saw his spirit, dazed, stretching out to grasp the truth, slipping back powerless to do it. It was like a thing moving through the gloom of deep waters—of deep, deep waters.”

Again Chichester’s voice died away. In the silence that followed the professor heard the faint ticking of a clock. He had not noticed it before. He could not tell now whether it came from within the room or from the room behind the folding-doors. It seemed to him as if this ticking destroyed his power to think clearly, as if it threw his brain into an unwonted confusion which made him feel strangely powerless. He was aware of a great uneasiness approaching, if not actually amounting to fear. This uneasiness made him long for light. Yet he knew that he dreaded light; for he was aware of an almost unconquerable reluctance to look upon the face of his companion. Beset by conflicting desires, therefore, and the prey of unwonted emotion, he sat like one paralyzed, listening always to the faint ticking of the clock, and striving to reduce what was almost like chaos to order in his brain.

“Why have you selected me to be the hearer of this—this very extraordinary statement?” he forced himself at length to say prosaically. The sound of his own dry voice somewhat reassured him, and he added: “Though there is nothing very extraordinary in the facts you have related.

Telepathic communication between one mind and another is a commonplace of to-day, an old story. Every one of course accepts it as possible. What novelty do you claim to present to startle science?"

"I say that telepathy does not explain the link between Marcus Harding and myself."

The professor struck his hand on the table. It seemed to him that if only he could get into an argument this strange confusion and fear might leave him. He would be on familiar ground.

"What you call vision might be merely mind-reading, what you call perceiving the action of the spirit, mind-reading. Your terror lest others should find out bad truths about Marcus Harding would spring naturally enough from your lingering regard for him. Your acute anxiety when he is preaching arises of course from the fact that, owing to bodily causes, no doubt, his mental powers are failing him, and he is no longer able to do himself justice."

"You don't understand. What I desired in our sittings was to draw into myself strength, power, will from—him. What have I done? I have drawn into myself the very man. That night when the shutter slipped back he looked out from the body of Henry Chichester. His mind worked, his soul was alive, within the cage of another man. And meanwhile Henry Chichester lay as if submerged, but presently stirred, and, however feebly, lived again. He lives now. But not from him comes my frightful comprehension of Marcus Harding. Not him does Marcus Harding fear. Not to him does she, the woman, look with the eyes of a slave. It is not he who dominates the crowds in St. Joseph's. It is not he who conceived that sermon of the man and his double. It is not he who has sometimes been terribly afraid."

"Afraid! Afraid!"

"There have been moments when I have been moved to snatch my double out of the sight of men. That day when we met Evelyn Malling I feared as I left them alone together; and when I found Malling intimately there in that house, I felt like one coming upon an ambush which might be destructive of his safety. My instinct was to detach Malling from my double, to attach him to myself. My conduct startled him. I saw that plainly. Yet I tried to win him over, as it were, to my side. He came to me. I strove to tell him, but something secret prevented me. And how could he assist me?"

Chichester got up from the table. The professor saw a darkness moving as he went to stand by the empty fireplace.

"I must look on truth," he continued; "I have to. The fascination of staring upon the truth of oneself is deadly, but it surpasses all other fascination. He sins more often now. I watch him sin. Sometimes under my contemplation I see him writhing like a thing in a trap—the semblance of myself. How the woman despises him now! Sometimes I feel deeply sad at my own ruthlessness. It is frightful to contemplate the physical wreck of a being whom, in some strange and hideous way, one always feels to be oneself. When I look at him it is as if his fallen face, his hanging nerveless hands, his down-drooping figure and eyes lit with despair were mine. His poses, his gestures, his physical tricks, they are all mine. I watch them with a cold, enveloping disgust, frozen in criticism of everything he does, anticipating every movement, every look, hating it when it comes, because it is bred out of the remnant of a spirit I despise as no man surely has ever despised before. Henry Chichester would pity, but he is overborne. He is in me as a drop may be in the ocean. I am most aware of him when my double sins. Only last night we sat"—Chichester came back to the table, and stood there, very faintly relieved against the darkness by the dim light which penetrated through the windows—"we sat in the darkness, and more deeply than ever before I went down into the darkness. I felt as if I were penetrating into the last recesses of a ruined temple. And there, in the ultimate chamber crouched all that was left of the

inmate, terrified, helpless, and ignorant. As I looked upon him I understood why man is never permitted really to know himself unless, in an access of mad folly and overweening pride, he succeeds in crossing the boundary which to pass is sheer wickedness. And I tried to turn away, but I could not—I could not. I made a supreme effort. It was in vain.

“I saw him go home. At last he was sick of his sin. There rose within him that strange longing for goodness, for purity and rest, that terrible, aching desire to be what those who once loved him for long had thought him to be, which perhaps never dies in the soul of a human being. Is it the instinct of the Creator burning like an undying spark in the created? And, as he drew near to his house, there came to him the resolve to speak, to acknowledge, to say, ‘This is what I am. Know me as I am! Care for me still, in spite of what I am!’ He went in, and sought her—the woman. She was alone. Sleep had not come to her. Perhaps some instinct had told her she must wake and be ready for something. Then he gathered together the little that was left to him of courage, and he strove to tell her, to make her understand some of the truth, to obtain from her the greatest of human gifts—the love of one from whom a man has no secrets that he can tell.

“She listened for a moment, then she thrust out her hands as if to push the truth of him out of her life. And last night she left him—going in fear of him.”

The professor shook his narrow shoulders, and sprang abruptly to his feet. The ticking of the clock now sounded almost like a hammer beating in his ears.

“It’s time we had some light,” he said in rather a loud voice.

The darkness that was Chichester moved. A gleam of light shone in the little room, revealing the thin Madonna, “The Light of the World,” the piano, the neatly bound books of the curate of St. Joseph’s; revealing Chichester, who now stood facing the professor, white, drawn, lined, but with eyes full of almost hideous resolution and power.

“I advise,” said the professor—“I advise you from this time forward—”

He stared into the eyes of the man opposite to him, and his voice died away in his throat.

When, immediately afterward, he found himself walking hurriedly toward Kensington High Street the sweat was pouring down his face.

XII

One night of that autumn, driven by an over-mastering impulse, Evelyn Malling set out toward Kensington. He felt that he must know something more of the matter between Marcus Harding and Henry Chichester. Stepton still kept silence. Malling had not approached him. But why should he not call upon Chichester, an acquaintance, almost a friend? It was true that he had resolved, having put the affair into Stepton’s hands, to wait. It had come to this, then, to-night that he could be patient no longer? As he stood at the corner of Hornton Street, he asked himself that question. He drew out his watch. It was already past eleven, an unholy hour for an unannounced visit. But slowly he turned into Hornton Street, slowly went down that quiet thoroughfare till he was opposite to the windows of the curate’s sitting-room. A light shone in one of them. The rest of the house was dark. Even the fanlight above the small front door displayed no yellow gleam. No doubt the household had retired to rest and Henry Chichester was sitting up alone. A rap would probably bring him down to open to his nocturnal visitor. But now Malling bethought himself seriously of the lateness of the hour, and paced slowly up and down, considering whether to seek speech of the curate or to abandon that idea and return to Cadogan Square. As in his mental debate he paused once more opposite to the solitary gleam in the first-floor window, an incident occurred which startled him, and gave a new bent to his thoughts. It

was this: The light in the window was obscured for a moment as if by some solid body passing before it. Then the window was violently thrown up, the large figure of a man, only vaguely perceived by Malling, appeared at it, and a choking sound dropped out into the night. The man seemed to be leaning out as if in an effort to fill his lungs with air, or to obtain the relief of the cool night wind for his distracted nerves. His attitude struck Malling as peculiar and desperate. Suddenly he moved. The light showed, and Malling saw for an instant a second figure, small, slight, commanding. The big man seemed to be sucked back toward the center of the room. Down came the window; the tranquil gleam of the light shone as before; then abruptly all was dark.

Malling realized at once what was happening in the curate's lodgings. As he paused, gazing at the dark house, he knew that the miserable Marcus Harding was within, constrained to endure the observation which, to use his own hideous but poignant phrase, was "eating him away." It was he who had appeared at the window, like a tortured being endeavoring to escape into the freedom of the night. It was Henry Chichester who had followed him, who had drawn him back, who had plunged him into darkness.

The street was deserted. No policeman passed, regarding him with suspicion, and Malling went on sentinel duty. The dark house fascinated him. More than once a desire came to him to make an effort for the release of Marcus Harding, to cross the street and to hammer brutally at the green door. He recalled Henry Chichester's strange sermon, and he felt as if he assisted at the torture of the double, which he himself had imaginatively suggested to the two clergymen in Lady Sophia's drawing-room. Ought he not to interrupt such a torture?

Midnight struck, and he had not knocked. One o'clock struck; he had paced the street, but had never gone out of sight of the curate's door. It was nearly two, and Malling was not far from the High Street end of the thoroughfare when he heard a door bang. He turned sharply. A heavy uncertain footstep rang on the pavement. Out of the darkness emerged a tall figure with bowed head. As it moved slowly forward once or twice it swayed, and a wavering arm shot out as if seeking for some support. Malling stood where he was till he saw the broad ghastliness of Marcus Harding's white face show under the ray of a lamp. He discerned no eyes. The eyes of the unhappy man seemed sunken out of recognition in the dreadful whiteness of his countenance. The gait was that of one who believes himself dogged, and who tries to slink furtively, but who has partly lost control of his bodily powers, and who starts in terror at his own too heavy and sounding footfalls.

This figure went by Malling, and was lost in the lighted emptiness of the High Street. Malling did not follow it. Now he had a great desire, born out of his inmost humanity, to speak with Henry Chichester. He made up his mind to return to the curate's door: if he saw a light to knock and ask for admittance; if the window was dark to go on his way. He retraced his steps, looked up, and saw a light. Then it was to be. That man and he were to speak together. But as he looked, the light was extinguished. Nevertheless he struck upon the door.

No one answered. He struck again, then stepped back into the roadway, and looked up at Chichester's window. The curate must surely have heard. Yes, for even as Malling gazed the window moved. No light appeared. But after a pause a voice above said:

"Is that you, Mr. Harding?"

The dim figure of a man was apparent, standing a little back and half concealed by a darkness of drooping curtains.

"It is I—Evelyn Malling," said Malling.

The form at the window started.

“Mr. Malling!” the words came uncertainly. “What is it? Has—has anything happened to—why do you want me at such an hour?”

“I chanced to be in your street and saw your light. I thought I would give you a hail.”

“Do you mean that you want to come in?”

After a short pause Malling answered, “Yes.”

“I cannot let you in!” the voice above cried out lamentably.

Then the window was shut very softly.

Three days later Malling saw in the papers the news of the complete breakdown of Marcus Harding. “Nervous prostration,” was the name given by the doctors to his malady, and it was announced that he had been ordered to take a sea voyage, and was preparing to start for Australia with a nurse.

Soon afterward Malling was walking in the afternoon down Pall Mall, wondering deeply what would happen, whether the rector would ever start on that voyage, when he came upon Professor Stepton sidling out of the Athenæum.

“Heard about Harding?” jerked out the professor.

“Yes. Has he sailed for Australia?”

“Dead. Died at half-past three o’clock this morning.”

Malling turned cold.

“Poor fellow!” he said. “Poor fellow!”

The professor was drawing his plaid shawl round his shoulders. When it was properly adjusted, he began to walk on. Malling kept almost mechanically beside him.

“Did you expect this?” Malling asked.

“Well, I knew he was failing.”

“And Chichester? Have you seen Chichester since his death?”

“No. Would you like to see him for me?”

Malling was deep in thought and did not answer.

“Do you think?” said the professor, “that Henry Chichester will be greatly affected by this death?”

“Affected? Do you mean by grief?”

“Yes.”

“I should suppose that to be highly improbable.”

The professor shot a very sharp glance at Malling.

“I’m not sure that I agree with you,” he observed dryly.

“Have you seen him lately?” asked Malling.

“Not quite recently. But if I had seen him, say, yesterday, I don’t think that would greatly affect my present dubiety. I should, however, like to set that dubiety at rest. Are you busy to-day?”

“I am. Will you make a little investigation for me? Will you go and pay a visit of condolence to Chichester on the death of his rector, and then come round to the White House and report?”

“I will if you wish it.”

“I shall be in after seven.”

“Very well.”

“I dare say you will be surprised,” observed Stepton. “I see my bus.”

Malling left him imperatively waving his arm, and, turning, walked toward Kensington.

What were his expectations? He did not know. Stepton had upset his mind. As he went on slowly he strove to regain his mental equilibrium. But he could not decide exactly what Stepton had meant. He felt inferior to the professor as he turned into Hornton Street.

He did not hesitate, but went at once to the curate's door and rapped. No one answered. He rapped again, and touched the bell, half hoping, even while he did so, that there was no one within to hear.

But an inquiring head appeared in the area, observed, and was sharply withdrawn. Steps sounded in the passage, and the maid Ellen presented herself, looking somewhat disordered.

"Yes, sir?" she said.

"Is Mr. Chichester at home?"

"He is in, sir, poor gentleman," replied the maid. "Did you want to see him?"

"Yes."

"I'm sure I don't know whether he will see you, sir."

"Is he ill?"

"Not to say ill, sir. But have n't you heard?"

"What?"

"His poor rector's gone, sir, what used to come here to visit him so regular. I never see a gentleman in such a way. Why, he's so changed I don't hardly know him."

"Have you been here long?" said Malling, abruptly.

"Only six months, sir.

The maid began to look rather astonished.

"And so Mr. Chichester is quite altered by his grief?"

"You never did, sir! He was so firm, was n he, above every one! Even his rector used to look to him and be guided by him. And now he's as gentle and weak almost as a new-born child, as they say."

Malling thought of Stepton. Had he looked forward to some such change?

"Perhaps I could console Mr. Chichester in his grief," he said. "Will you take him this card and ask if I can see him? I knew Mr. Harding, too. I might be of use, possibly."

"I'll ask him, sir. He's laying down on the bed, I do believe."

Ellen hurried up-stairs with the card. It seemed to Malling that she was away for a long time. At last she returned.

"If you please, sir, Mr. Chichester wants to know if it's anything important. He's feeling very bad, poor gentleman. But of course if it's anything important, he would n't for all the world say no."

"It is important."

"Then I was to ask you to walk in, sir, please." Chichester's sitting-room was empty when Malling came into it, and the folding-doors between it and the bedroom were shut. Ellen went away, and Malling heard a faint murmur of voices, and then Ellen's footstep retreating down the stairs. Silence followed. He waited, at first standing. Then he sat down near the piano. Not a sound reached him from the bedroom. On the curate's table lay a book. Malling took it up. The title was "God's Will be Done." The author was a well-known high-church divine, Father Rowton. To him, then, Henry Chichester betook himself for comfort. The piano stood open. On it was music. Malling looked and saw, "Oh, for the wings, for the wings of a dove!" by Mendelssohn. The little room seemed full of pious orthodoxy. Surely its atmosphere was utterly changed since Malling last was in it. The melody of "Oh, for the wings!" went through his brain.

That the Henry Chichester he had recently known, that cruel searcher after and expounder of truth, that he should be helped by those words, by that melody, in an hour of sorrow!

There was a movement in the bedroom. The folding-doors opened inward, and the curate appeared. He was very pale, and looked really ill. His face had fallen in. His fair hair was slightly disordered, and his blue eyes were surrounded by red rims. His expression suggested that he had recently undergone an extremely violent shock, which had shaken badly both body and mind. He looked dazed. Coming forward feebly, he held out his hand.

"I believe it is something important," he said in a gentle, rather wavering voice; otherwise—I am hardly fit, I fear, to be with my kind. I"—He sat down—"I have had a terrible shock, Mr. Malling. You have heard?"

"You mean Mr. Harding's death?"

"Yes."

"I have just heard of it."

"It occurred at half-past three o'clock last night, or, rather, this morning. He had been declining for a long while. At the last he just faded out, as it were. The strange thing is that I knew the exact moment when he entered into rest."

"You were n't with him? "

"Oh, no. I was here, asleep. But at three o'clock I awoke. I felt violently agitated. I can scarcely describe the sensation. It was as if I was torn, as if mind and body, or spirit and body, were torn, lacerated. I suffered the greatest conceivable agony. I tried to cry out, but I could not. Nor could I move. Then everything suddenly seemed to fail, all in a moment, and I was at peace. But it was like the peace of death, I think. And I was aware—I don't know how—that Mr. Harding was dead. I moved. I looked at my watch. It was a minute after half-past three. I noted down the time. And this morning—I heard."

"And then?"

"Only then I understood my loss—the loss to us all. Ah, Mr. Malling, you knew him, but not as I did! Few or none knew him as I did. He was the greatest and best of men, full of power, but full of kindness and goodness, too. He guided me in everything. I can never tell you how I looked up to him, how I trusted him. His judgment was extraordinary, his reading of character was unerring. I do believe he knew me better than I knew myself. What shall I do without him?"

The curate's grief was almost as genuine and unselfconscious as a child's, and Malling felt as if at that moment, like a child, he felt himself adrift in a difficult world. His gentle, kindly, but not strong face was distorted, but not hardened, by his distress, which seemed begging for sympathy. And Malling remembered the Henry Chichester he had known some years ago, before the days of St. Joseph's, the saintly but rather weak man, beloved by every one, but ruling no one. That man was surely before him, and that man knew not how to play a hypocrite's part. Yet Malling felt he must test him.

"His death is very sad," he replied; "but surely his powers had been on the decline for a long while."

"His powers, but not his capacity for goodness. His patience was angelic. Even when the cruelest blow of all fell upon him, even when his wife—whom, God forgive me! I don't think some of us can ever forgive—even when she deserted him in his hour of need, he never complained. He knew it was God's hand upon him, and he submitted. He has taught me what true patience is. What I owe to him! What I owe to him!"

As if distressed beyond measure, the curate got up, almost wringing his thin hands.

“It was he who sacrificed his time for me!” he continued, moving restlessly about the room. “But I seem to remember I told you. Did n’t I tell you—or was it some one else?—how he gave up the hours which should have been hours of repose in order that my will might be strengthened, that I might be developed into a man more worthy to be his coadjutor? When I think, when I remember—”

His light, tenor voice failed. Tears stood in his gentle, blue eyes.

“If I am worth anything at all,” he suddenly cried out, “if I have gained any force of character, any power for good at all, I owe it all to my rector’s self-sacrificing endeavors on my behalf—of course, through God’s blessing.”

“Then,” said Malling, “you think that Mr. Harding changed you by his influence?”

“He helped me to develop, he brought me on. Jealousy was unknown to him. I was a very poor preacher. He taught me how to hold people’s attention. When I knew he was near me I sometimes seemed almost inspired. I was inspired by him. I preached almost as if out of his mouth. And now!”

He made a despairing gesture.

“Now it will all be different!” he exclaimed.

And almost involuntarily Malling found himself echoing:

“Yes, now it will all be different.”

He had seen, he had heard, enough to make his report to the professor, and he resolved to go. He held out his hand.

“Oh, but,” said Chichester, pressing one hand to his forehead, “I’m so selfish, so forgetful in my great grief! Surely you said you had come on some matter of importance.”

“It will wait,” said Malling. “Another day. Go and rest now. You need rest. Any one can see that.”

“Thank you, thank you,” said Chichester, with quivering lips. “You are very thoughtful, very good.”

Malling took his hand in farewell. As he did so there was a sharp knock at the front door. Chichester started violently.

“Oh, I do hope it is no one for me!” he cried out. “I cannot—”

He opened the door of the sitting-room a little way and listened. Voices were audible below, Ellen’s voice and another woman’s.

“You, ma’am! Oh, of course he will see you!”

“Of course.”

“I did n’t know who it was, ma’am.”

“Is it this way?”

“Yes, ma’am. I’ll show you. We do feel it, ma’am. The poor gentleman used to come here so often of nights.”

“Did he? I did n’t know that.”

Malling recognized the second voice as Lady Sophia’s. A moment, and she was ushered into the room. She was dressed in black, but not in widow’s weeds, and wore a veil which she pushed hastily up as she came in almost with a rush. When she saw Malling, for a moment she looked disconcerted.

“Oh, I thought—” she began. She stood still. Chichester said nothing, and did not move. Malling went toward her.

“I was very much grieved,” he said, “at the news I heard to-day.”

She gave him her hand. He knew his words were conventional. How could they be anything else? But Lady Sophia's manner in giving him her hand was not conventional. She stretched it out without even looking at him. She said nothing. Her eyes were fixed upon Chichester, who stood on the other side of the little room in a rigid attitude, with his eyes cast down, as if he could not bear to see the woman who had just entered.

"I offer you my sympathy," Malling added.

"Sympathy!" said Lady Sophia, with a sharp note in her voice suggestive of intense, almost febrile excitement. "Then did n't you know?"

She stared at him, turning her head swiftly.

"Know?"

"That I had left him? Yes, I left him, and now he is dead. Do you expect me to be sorry? Well, I am not sorry. Ah, I see you don't understand!"

She made a movement toward Chichester. It was obvious that she was so intensely excited that she had lost the power of self-control.

"Nobody understands me but you!" she cried out to Chichester. "You knew what he was, you knew what I endured, you know what I must feel now. Oh, it's no use pretending. I'm sick of pretence. You have taught me to care for absolute truth and only that. My relations, my friends—ah! to-day I have been almost suffocated with hypocrisy! And now, when I come here—" she flung out her hand toward Malling—"to get away from it all—'grieved,' 'my sympathy!' I can't bear any more of that. Tell him! You tell him! You're so strong, so terribly sincere! One can rest upon your strength when all else fails one!"

She tottered. For an instant it seemed to Malling that she was going to fail against Chichester's shoulder; but she caught at a chair, and saved herself.

"Mr. Chichester!" she said, "tell him! Tell him for me!"

"I have nothing to tell him," said Chichester, with a sort of mild, almost weak coldness, and wearily.

"Nothing!" She went nearer to him. "But—you don't welcome me!"

Chichester looked up, but immediately cast down his eyes again.

"I cannot," he said. "At this moment I simply cannot."

An expression of terrified surprise transformed Lady Sophia's face. She went close up to Chichester, staring at him.

"Why not?" she asked.

"You must know that."

She stood still, always staring at him, as if searching for something which she did not find.

"Why not?" she repeated.

"You left—him when he needed you most. You left him to die alone."

Lady Sophia suddenly turned round to Malling and scrutinized his face, as if demanding from him sympathy in her horrified amazement. He regarded her calmly, and she turned again to the curate.

"What do you mean?" she said, and her voice had changed.

"That his friends can never be yours," said Chichester, as if making a great effort, driven to it by some intense feeling.

"You call yourself his friend!" said Lady Sophia. Her voice vibrated with scorn.

"At any rate, he was mine, my best friend. And now he has gone forever!"

Lady Sophia drew in her breath.

"You hypocrite!" she said. "You hypocrite!"

She spoke like one under the influence of an emotion so intense that it could not be gainsaid.

“To pretend you admired him, loved him—you!”

“I did admire and love him.”

She seemed to be struck dumb by his quiet manner, by the conviction in his voice. In a moment she turned round again toward Malling. Her face had quite changed. It was working nervously. The mouth quivered. She stood for a moment, then suddenly she made for the door. As she passed Malling, she whispered: “The strength—where is it? Oh, I’m afraid of him! I’m afraid of him!”

She disappeared. Almost immediately Malling heard the street door shut.

“I—I cannot pretend to her,” Chichester said, “even in my own house.”

He seemed greatly moved, almost on the verge of tears.

“I’ll leave you alone,” said Malling. “You need to be alone.”

“Thank you! Thank you!” said Chichester. And without another word he went into the bedroom, shutting the folding-doors behind him.

At half-past seven that same evening Malling was with Professor Stepton, and made what the professor called his “report.”

“Ah!” said the professor when he had finished.

“Did you expect Chichester to behave like that, to be like that?” asked Malling.

“I hoped he would.”

“Hoped! Why?”

“Because it enables me to accept as facts certain things about which I must otherwise have remained in doubt. Of course I must see Chichester for myself. But he’ll be just the same, Just the same.”

The professor’s eyes shone, and he poked his chin forward.

“The reverend gentlemen of St. Joseph’s have provided me with a basis,” he exclaimed emphatically.

“A basis! For what?” asked Malling.

“For future experiments and investigations of a highly interesting nature. Ruskin was very often wrong, but he was right when he said, in a lucid moment, that every creature is precious. Well, good-night, Malling. I must get to work. I’ll explain everything to you later.”

Almost joyously he shut the door on his friend. Almost joyously he sat down once more before his writing-table and seized his pen and his notebook.

But he did not begin to write. His face suddenly changed. He put his pen down, pushed his note-book away, sat back in his chair, and let his pointed chin drop toward his breast. And presently he began to mutter to himself.

“A little science!” he muttered. “A little science sends man far away from God. A great deal of science brings man back to God. Which is it now—you professor, you? Which is it now?”