

Thorne Guy

The Hypocrite



Guy Thorne
The Hypocrite

«Public Domain»

Thorne G.

The Hypocrite / G. Thorne — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	10
CHAPTER III	16
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	17

Thorne Guy

The Hypocrite

CHAPTER I

YARDLY GOBION OPENS HIS LETTERS

"I am thinking of writing my impressions, binding them in red leather, with a *fleur-de-lys* stamped in the corner, and distributing them among my friends," said the youth with the large tie.

"My good fool," said the President of the Union, who sat by the fire, "you must remember that most of us know you are a humbug."

"Quite so, but I'm not going to do it for the journalistic set. Don't you know that, owing to my youthful appearance and earnest eyes, I have an admiring circle of people who worship me as their god – good, healthy, red people, who like moonlight in the quad, and read leading articles? It is very amusing. I wear a great mass of hair, and look at them with far-away eyes instinct with intellectual pain; and sometimes when we get very solemn, the tears rise slowly, and I talk in clear tones of effort, of will – the toil, the struggle, the Glorious Reward! They absolutely love me, and I live on them, borrow their allowances, drink their whiskey – in short, rook them largely all round."

"It is a good thing," said a Merton man, whom they called the Prophet, "that you have an ark of refuge, where there is no necessity to pose, and where you can freely behave like the scoundrel you are; soul-scraping with earnest freshmen is doubtless profitable, but I should say it was wearing."

"That's the worst of it. I have to disguise the fact that I know you people, and write for *The Dead Bird*; it is horribly difficult. I find, though, that when I am just a little drunk I do it much better. One can look more *spirituel*, and play the game better all round. Unfortunately the entrances and exits require management. When one is leaning back in a padded armchair, it is easy to appear sober; but coming into a big room full of men, and picking one's way through them to get to the aforesaid chair, is very perilous work."

"'Where there's a swill there's a sway,' I suppose," said the Prophet.

"Exactly," said the youth, with a yawn; "you are becoming singularly apt at a certain sort of machine-made epigram. I will have a short drink – quite short. Yes, please – Scotch – " He splashed some soda-water into his tumbler from a syphon on the table, drank it off at a gulp, and got up.

"I really must go now; I am to speak third at the Wadham debate, so I mustn't be late."

He got his hat – a soft felt one – and arranging his tie in the glass over the mantelpiece, went out with a smile. The rooms belonged to the President of the Union, who was living out of college. They were rooms arranged with an eye to effect; the owner posed in his furniture as well as in his person, though there was no particular evidence of luxury or straining after cheap æstheticism.

A few armchairs, a sideboard covered with bottles, and two large bookshelves full of paper-backed novels of Heller and Maupassant, with a few portly historical treatises of the Taswell-Langmead type, were the most prominent objects.

It was evident, however, that a central idea influenced the arrangement. Sturtevant wrote little decadent studies for any London paper that would take them. He had scattered notes from literary people about the mantelpiece. The table was covered with proof-slips, magazines, and empty glasses, while his latest piece of work, a thin book bound in brown paper, called *The Harmonies of Sin*, lay in a conspicuous place on the window-seat.

When Yardly Gobion, the youth who had been speaking, had gone, Sturtevant and the Prophet, whose real name was Condamine, drew up their chairs to the fire, lighting fresh cigarettes. They

had been drinking all day, and were by this time in the stage that knows no reticence. It is the stage immediately preceding a pious fervour and resolve to start a new life.

Both of them were men of mark in the University.

Sturtevant had come up to Oxford with a brilliant scholarship from a public school which was growing in reputation every year, the Head-master being a high churchman who made a scientific study of advertising his own personality in the weekly press as an earnest ascetic, but who in reality was merely a Sybarite masquerading as a monk. Sturtevant was the show boy of Hailton, and soon made himself felt in his year at Oxford.

He spoke well and brilliantly at the Union and various college debating societies. He affected an utter disregard for morals, pretending so vigorously that Irish whiskey was entirely necessary to salvation that he soon came to believe in his own pose, and to find a day impossible without frequent "short drinks."

Though his eyesight was excellent he carried a single eyeglass, and on alternate days wore a hunting stock or a Liberty yellow silk tie.

The extraordinary thing about the man was that he was not merely a poseur; he really had remarkable cleverness, and despite his life he had done excellently well in the Schools and Union. In this his last term he was at the head of things literary, and of the "Modern" school at Oxford.

Condamine was a different type of man. He had done nothing very much but talk, but had a great influence with the cleverest set. He was tall, with a white, clean-shaven face, and an oracular way of holding forth which had earned him the name of Prophet. He lived as if life were a painful duty which he must perform, but very much against his inclination.

He was a very high churchman, who on Sunday mornings might often be seen walking up the aisle of St. Barnabas carrying a richly-illuminated mass-book. "Sunday," he would say, "should be a day of rest." He defined himself as a psychological hedonist.

"Young Gobion is a very clever blackguard," said the Prophet.

"Yes, he is," said Sturtevant; "he looks so young and innocent, and he talks well."

"Is he a pure adventurer?"

"No, I don't quite think that; he comes of a good family, but they won't have anything to do with him, and for the last term or two he has been living on his wits. He's nearly done now, though. I should think he'd drop out after this term."

"I never knew how far to believe the man. I suppose he does write a good deal?"

"Yes, that's quite true. I've seen his things in *The Book Review* and in *The Pilgrim*. I imagine too he makes a good deal out of the Church party."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Why, he acts a fit of remorse and horror at the life he is leading, goes to Father Gray to confession, and then borrows ten pounds to start a new life."

Sturtevant laughed an evil little snigger and poured out some more whiskey.

They had blown out the lamp as the oil was low, and the room was only lighted by the dull glow of the dying fire. The air was heavy with cigarette smoke and the smell of spirits, and both men felt bored and sleepy.

Condamine was afraid a fit of depression was approaching, so he raised himself in his chair, and began to drive away his thoughts by telling Sturtevant risky stories.

They were far too clever to really care much for cheap nastiness, but both felt it a relief from the state of nervous tension that a long day's continuous drinking had induced.

"One touch of indecency makes the whole world grin, to paraphrase the immortal bard," he said, and they both laughed and sighed.

Suddenly a man in the rooms above who had a piano began to play the Venusberg music from *Tannhäuser* very quietly.

Almost simultaneously with the beginning of the music the moon, like a piece of carved silver floating through the winter sky, attended by a little drift of fluffy amber and sulphur-coloured clouds, swung round from behind New College tower, sending a broad band of green light across the room.

Sturtevant's white face was thrown into sharp relief against the shadow.

Condamine sat quite still, shivering a little. He felt cold. The strange music tinkled on, like the overture to some strange experience, sounding almost unearthly to those two unhappy souls in the room below.

Sturtevant's face twitched. His nerves were all wrong, and he was subject to small facial contortions.

The moon moved farther away from the tower, and, peeping over a gargoyle, shone still more directly into the room. On the wall opposite the window was a picture of the Dutch realistic school, a heavy hairless face, fat, with a look of vacuous excitement.

Condamine stared fixedly at it.

Suddenly the music stopped, and the man above shut the piano with a bang that jarred among the strings.

Condamine jumped up with a curse, looking as if he had been asleep. Then he yawned, and taking his cap and gown, without speaking left the room.

It was then upon nine o'clock, and he went to the Union and fought depression by firing off epigrams to a crowd of men in the smoking-room with the assured air of a man of vogue.

The Wadham debate was over about eleven, and soon after the hour had struck, Yardly Gobion left the college and strolled down the Broad in the moonlight.

He had, as usual, made a sensation.

They had been discussing a social question, and though what knowledge of the matter he had came as much from intuition as experience, he spoke well and brilliantly, and now lit his cigarette with a pleasing sense of strength and nerve running through him. The sunshine of applause seemed to warm his impressionable brain, to make it expand with the power of receiving and mentally recording more vivid impressions. He had a pleasing consciousness of being very young and very interesting.

He was wonderfully quick and sympathetic in his perceptions, and he could see that every one of the good-natured men at the debate was thinking what a clever fellow he was.

He felt instinctively how all his carefully-studied tricks of manner and personal eccentricities told. The big football-playing, warm-hearted undergraduates admired him for his soft felt hat, his terra-cotta tie, his way of arranging his hands when he sat down, and his epigrams.

They imagined that all these things were the outcroppings of a distinctive personality, and indeed these little poses would have deceived, and very often did, far cleverer persons than they were.

To-night he had said in his speech of a certain genial and popular social reformer that he was a "doctrinaire with a touch of Corney Grain grafted on to a polemic attitude," and already in the Common Room they were chuckling over what they thought was a happy piece of impromptu caricature.

Gobion sauntered down the Broad and Turl to the college gates, and when he knocked in found several letters waiting for him in the lodge. He took them up to his rooms, turned on the light (they have electric light at Exeter), and arranged them in a row on the table. Then he turned and looked at himself in the glass. His hand shook till he had had some brandy, and he was several minutes moving restlessly about the room, putting on a blazer, and placing some stray books back on the shelves, before he sat down to read the first letter. He toyed about with it for some minutes, afraid to open it.

Outside in the quad a wine party were shouting and singing, their voices echoing strangely in the still winter night, their drunken shouts seeming to be mellowed and made musical by the ancient buildings. At last, with a quick nervous look round the room, he tore open the envelope and began to read. Without any heading the letter began: —

*"Bassington Vicarage,
"Sunday Night.*

"I have heard from Dr. Fletcher that you are suspected to be carrying on an intrigue with a low woman in Oxford; that you have not passed a single examination, and that you consistently fritter away your time in speaking at debating societies, and are in the habit of being frequently intoxicated.

"You have written me accounts of your progress and work at the University, which, on investigation, I find to be simply a tissue of lies.

"I have had bills for large amounts sent to me during the last few weeks from tradesmen, saying that they find it impossible to get any money from you, and that you ignore their communications. You have had splendid opportunities, a good name, with abilities above the average, and I believed that you would have done me credit. Your deceit and cruelty have broken my heart.

"I shall do nothing further for you, and you must make your own plans for the future.

"I shall not help you in any way.

"Your unhappy

"Father."

He got up and had some more brandy, walking about the room. "I knew the old fool would find out soon. My God, though, it's rather sudden. I haven't twopence in the world, and the High Church people are beginning to smell a rat. Damn this collar – it's tight..." He tore it off, smashing the head of the stud, which rolled under the fender with a sharp metallic click. After a time he sat down again. The feeling of ruin was already passing away, and his face lost its sweetness and youth, while a sharp keen look took its place – the look that he wore when at night he was alone and plotting, a haggard, old look which no one ever saw but Condamine or Sturtevant.

He took up the next letter, a small envelope addressed in a girl's hand: —

*"Westcott,
"Wooton Woods."*

"Dearest Caradoc, – You cannot think how delighted I was to get your letter on Saturday. I have been thinking of you a good deal the last two or three weeks, and wondering why you did not write.

"Had you forgotten all about me? I expect so, but there is some excuse for you, as you must meet heaps of *pretty* girls in Oxford. Do write me a nice long letter soon – a *nice* letter, you know.

*"Good-bye, dearest —
"Your very loving
"Goodie.*

"P.S. – Excuse scrawl."

The hard, keen expression faded away, his eyes filling with tears, while the light played caressingly on his face and tumbled hair.

It was his one pure affection, an attachment for a dear little girl of seventeen, a clergyman's daughter in the country. He thought of the evening walks in the sweet summer meadows, when the "mellow lin lan lone of evening bells" ringing for evensong floated over the corn. He remembered how her hair had touched his face, and how she had whispered "dearest."

And then the thoughts of all the other women in Oxford and London came crowding into his brain. The hot kisses, the suppers and patchouli-scented rooms, the slang and high tinkling laughter. His brow wrinkled up with pain as he walked up and down the room, filled with a supreme self-pity.

He remembered half unconsciously that Charles Ravenshoe had said, "Will the dawn never come? Will the dawn never come?" and he began to moan it aloud, with an æsthetic pleasure in the feeling of desolation and melancholy wasted hours – "will the dawn *never* come?" He came opposite the looking-glass, and was struck with the beauty of his own face, sad and pure. He gazed intently for a minute or two, then his features relaxed, and he breathed hard and smiled, murmuring, "Ah, well, a little purity and romance whip the jaded soul pleasantly. Goodie is a darling, and I love her, but still the others were amusing and piquant. They were the iota subscripts of love!"

There were still two more letters to be opened. One ran: —

"162a, Strand, W.C.

"Dear Mr. Yardly Gobion, – I shall be glad if you will do us a review of Canon Emeric's new book, *Art and Religion*. We can take half a column – leaded type; and shall be glad to have the copy by Friday at the latest. Are you going to be in town at all soon? If so I shall possibly be able to give you work on *The Pilgrim*, as we want an extra man, and I have been quite satisfied with what you have done for us so far.

"Please do not be later than Friday with the review.

"Believe me, yours very truly,

"James Heath."

"Just what I want! good – I like *The Pilgrim*, it's smart – this is luck. I suppose they like my 'occ' reviews. Heath always likes work that keeps cleverly on the border, and I imagine that I have shown him how to be realistic without being indelicate. Dear old Providence manages things very well after all. I really must do a short drink on the strength of this."

And he had some more brandy.

The last letter was simply a breakfast invitation.

He sat up for half an hour more making plans for the morrow, finally deciding to borrow all the money he could and go up to town in the afternoon.

It was now nearly half-past one, and the excitement of the debate and later of the letters had left him shaking and tired, so he turned out the light and went into his bedroom. Just as he was closing the door of communication, he noticed by the firelight that his father's letter had dropped on the hearthrug, and he went back, putting it in the fire with a grin.

Then the door shut, and the room was silent.

CHAPTER II

SCOTT IS LONELY

Bravery Reginald Scott, of Merton, was one of Gobion's chief admirers. He thought that no one was so clever or so good, and felt sure that his friend's traducers – and they were many – had never really got down below the crust of cynicism and surface immorality of mind as he had done. He certainly knew that Gobion occasionally drank more than was good for him, but he put it down to misadventure more than taste.

He was a good young man, rather commonplace in intellect, but of a blameless life and an unsuspecting, happy temperament.

A man who had always been on the best of terms with an adoring family and a wealthy father, he ambled easily through life, enjoying everything, and being especially happy when he was worked up into an emotion by a poem or sunset.

Generally tethered in the shallows of everyday circumstances, his mind experienced undimmed delight in acute sensation.

He had one great motif running like a silver thread through his consciousness – his love for Gobion; and every night he humbly and earnestly prayed for him, kneeling at a little *prie-Dieu* painted green.

To him there had been something very sacred in his relations with this man. One night Gobion had stayed behind after a wine party, and had sat late, staring into the fire and talking simply and hopefully about the trials and temptations of a young man's life. Very frankly he had talked with a nobleness of ideal and breadth of thought that fascinated Scott and made him feel drawn close to this strange handsome boy who was so assured and so hopeful.

After that first night there had been others when they sat alone, and Gobion talked airily with a fantastic wealth of fancy and sweetness of expression.

Scott thought he could see in all this man's conversation a high purpose and a stainless purity, made the more obvious by attempts at concealment.

Then again, Gobion gave him the impression of being delightfully unworldly, with no idea of the value of money, for he would come to him unconcernedly and borrow ten pounds to get out of some scrape, with a careless freedom that seemed to point to an absolute childishness in money matters.

Scott always lent it, and gloried in the feeling that he was helping the friend of his soul, albeit that Gobion had had most of his available cash, and he knew his affairs were getting something precarious.

On the morning of the Wadham debate he lay in bed half dozing, with a pleasing sense of anticipation.

Gobion was coming to a *tête-à-tête* breakfast, and he wondered what he would talk about, whether he would wear what he called his "explicit" tie or that green suit which became him so well.

Not far away in Exeter, the object of his thoughts was getting up and carefully dressing. He was thinking over the part he would have to play at breakfast, and devising some way of breaking the news of his approaching flight, and thinking out a plan for getting as much money as he could to take him up to town.

He had finished his toilette, and was passing out of his bedroom when he noticed that he looked in capital health, and not at all anxious or unhappy enough for a ruined man.

Scott would doubtless never have noticed, but Gobion was nothing if not an artist, and had a hatred of incompleteness.

Accordingly, he pulled a box of water-colour paints out of a drawer in his writing table, and carefully pencilled two dark sepia lines under his eyes, several times sponging them off till he had got what he considered a proper effect.

About a quarter after nine Scott's bedroom door opened unceremoniously, and Gobion came in. Scott jumped up.

"I'm beastly sorry, old man, to be so slack. I'll be up in a minute. Is brekker in?"

"Never mind, old man; I'll go back into the next room and wait."

When breakfast was brought they sat for a time in silence. Then Gobion spoke.

"Old man, the game's up."

"What!"

"I'm done – utterly."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you know how unlucky I have been in exams, and what a small allowance I have always had?"

"Yes."

"Well, the guvnor has written saying that I am idle and hopeless, and has taken my name off the books and refused to have anything more to do with me."

Scott gasped. "Oh, Lord, I *am* so sorry – dear old man – never mind, remember we promised to stick to each other. Now let's talk it over. What do you propose to do?"

"I shall go up to town this afternoon if I can get some money. I have had some work offered me on *The Pilgrim*, and I am sure to get along somehow."

"Of course you will, old man, you always succeed – look here, have you got any 'oof?"

"Not a penny."

"Well, I've got about twenty pounds I don't want. You had better take them."

"Thanks awfully, old chap, but I don't think I will, I owe you too much as it is. I don't know when I shall be able to repay you."

"Oh, but do, old man, you *must* have some cash."

"Well, if – "

"Ah, I knew you wouldn't mind; let me write you a cheque, you can cash it at the Old Bank this morning."

And he got out his cheque-book and wrote it. Gobion took it without saying anything, but he stretched out his hand and looked him in the face. With wonderful intuition he knew exactly what the other expected, and Scott felt repaid by his warm grasp and silence, which, as Gobion expected, he mistook for emotion.

After a melancholy cigarette Gobion got up and said, "You'll come and see me off, of course? I've got a lot to do, but I will have tea here at four and you can come to the station after. My train leaves at 5.30. Do you mind telling Robertson and Fleming, and anyone else you come across, and getting them to come too?"

The sun was shining when Gobion got out, and he thought that his first success was a good omen for the future. He strolled up to the bank feeling well fed and happy, and the strangeness of his position induced a pleasing sense of excitement and anticipation. He liked to think that he would be in the Strand that same evening.

When he had got his money he went to Condamine's rooms in Grove Street, where, as he expected, he found Sturtevant. He wore the yellow silk tie this morning.

They were having breakfast, and Condamine, unwashed and unshaven, dressed in pyjamas, with his feet thrust into a venerable pair of dancing pumps with the bows gone, was indignantly holding forth on the unapproachable manner of some barmaid or other whom he had discovered.

Gobion took the proffered drink. "First this mornin'," he said, and then, "I'm going down to-day."

"Game up?" said Sturtevant. These men were never excited.

"Exactly. When shall you be up?"

"I shall be in my chambers, 6, Middle Temple Lane, in three weeks' time, ready for a campaign in Fleet Street; we'll work together."

"Right you are; but aren't you afraid of my queering your pitch?"

"I'll take the risk of that. When do you go?"

"Five-thirty train."

"Shall we come to the station?" said Condamine.

"No, don't, the 'good' set will be there, and as I hope to carry off most of their spare cash, I think it would be wiser to depart in the odour of sanctity, and you'd rather spoil it."

"Right oh!" said the president, using one of his favourite phrases, and then raising his glass to his lips, "The old toast?"

"The old toast," said Condamine, "the three consonants"; and they drank it and said good-bye.

These three men were bound together by many an orgie, many a shady intrigue and modest swindle; they had no illusions about each other, but now they all felt a keen pang of regret that their little society was to be broken up.

Gobion went out feeling sorry, but he had too much to do to indulge in sentiment. He hoped to turn his twenty pounds into forty before lunch.

As he went into the High, bells were ringing, tutors hurrying along, and men going to lectures in cap and gown. A group of men in "Newmarkets" came round the corner of King Edward Street, going to hunt, and nearly knocked down Professor Max Müller, who was carrying a brown paper parcel and walking very fast. The Jap shop-girl in a new hat passed with a smile, and a Christchurch man and rowing blue came out of the "Mitre," where, no doubt, he had been looking over the morning paper, and gleaning information about his own state of health. The scene was bright and animated, and the winter's sun cast a glamour over everything.

Nearly every other man stopped and spoke to Gobion, and he felt strangely moved to think that he would soon be out of it all and forgotten.

He turned into the stable-yard of the "Bell," and stood there for a moment irresolutely, frowning, and then with a quick movement went into the private bar.

It was quite empty of customers, and a girl sat before the fire with her feet on the fender reading a novel.

She jumped up when Gobion came in, and he put his arm round her waist and kissed her. She was a pretty, fresh-looking girl, and would have been prettier still if she had not so obviously darkened her eyelashes with a burnt hairpin.

Gobion sat down on the chair, and pulled her on to his knee, smiling at her, and puffing rings of cigarette smoke at her.

She settled herself comfortably, leaning back in his arms, and began to rattle away in a rather high-pitched voice about a raid of the proctors the night before.

As is the habit of the more "swagger" sort of barmaid, she used the word "awfully" (with the accent on the *aw*) once or twice in nearly every sentence, and it was curious to hear how glibly the Varsity slang and contractions slipped from her.

He played with a loose curl of hair, thinking what a pretty little fool she was.

"Maudie dear, I'm going away."

"Do you mean for *good*?"

"I'm afraid so, darling."

She opened her eyes wide and puckered up her forehead. She looked very nice, and he kissed her again.

"I don't understand," she said.

"Well, the fact is the guv'nor has stopped supplies, and I'm sent down."

"And you're going to leave *me*?.. and we've had such an awfully jolly time ... oh, you cruel boy!"

And she began to sob.

He grinned perplexedly over her head.

"... Never mind, dearest, I'll write to you and come down and see you soon."

"I don't know *what* I shall do... I l-liked you s-so much better than the others... *Don't go.*"

"But, Maudie, I must. Look here, I will come in after lunch and arrange things properly. I'm in a fearful hurry now, and I shan't go till to-morrow."

"Really!"

"Oh, rather; now give me a B. and S. I really must depart."

She got up from his knee, and went behind the counter in the corner of the room.

"I'm going to have some first," she said.

"You're a naughty little girl!"

"Am I? you rather like it, don't you?" ... She looked tempting when she smiled.

"May I?"

"You've had such a lot!"

"Just one to keep me going till after lunch."

"Stupid boy; well, there – "

"That was ve-ry nice. Good-bye for the present, dear."

She made a little mock curtsy. "I shall expect you at two ... dear!"

He kissed his hand and shut the door, breathing a sigh of relief when he got outside.

"She won't see me again. I'm well out of that," he thought, his cheeks still burning with her hot kisses.

"Now for the worst ordeal."

Father Gray came out of the private chapel of the clergy-house in his cassock and biretta.

He had been hearing the somewhat long confession of an innocuous but unnecessary Keble man, and felt inclined to be irritable. He met Gobion going up to his room.

His pale lined face lighted up – most people's faces did when they saw Gobion.

"You here, dear boy? Come in – come into my room."

He opened the door, and went in with his hand on Gobion's shoulder. The room was panelled in dark green, and warmed by a gas stove. The shelves were filled with books, and books littered the floor and chairs, and even invaded two big writing-tables covered with papers. Over the mantelpiece was hung a print of Andrea Mantegna's Adoration of the Magi. On the wall opposite was a great crucifix, while underneath it was a little shelf covered with worn black velvet, with two silver candlesticks standing on it.

Behind a green curtain stood an iron frame, holding a basin and jug of water.

All the great Anglican priests had been in that room at one time or another.

From it retreats were organized, the innumerable squabbles of the various sisterhoods settled, and arrangements made for the private confession of High Church bishops who required a tonic.

In fact, this business-like little room was in itself the head-quarters of what that amusing print *The English Churchman* would call "the most Romanizing members of the Ritualistic party."

They sat down. Father Gray said, "You have something to tell me?"

"Yes," Gobion answered sadly, "I am ruined."

"Oh, come, come! What's all this? A boy like you can't be ruined."

"My father has put the last touch to his unkindness, and quite given me up. You know how I have tried to work and lead a decent life; but he won't listen, and I'm going to work at journalism in London and take my chance."

"My poor boy, my poor boy!" And the old priest was silent.

Then he said, "Do you think you can keep yourself?"

"I am sure I can, if only I can tide over the first three months. I expect it will be very hard at first though."

"Have you any money?"

"No; and I am heavily in debt into the bargain."

"Oh, well, well, we must manage all that somehow. I won't let you starve. You have always been so frank with me, and told me all your troubles. We understand one another; you must let me lend you some for a time."

"It's awfully good of you."

"Oh, nonsense, these things are nothing between you and me; here is a cheque for five-and-twenty pounds, that will keep you going for a month or two. You know I'm not exactly a poor man. Now you'll stay to lunch, the Bishop's coming."

"No, thanks, I won't stay, I'll say good-bye now; I want to be alone and think. Thank you so very much; I haven't led a very happy life at Oxford, but I *have* tried ... and you've been so kind... I am afraid I am utterly unworthy of it all"; and his voice trembled artistically.

"My boy," said the old man, and his face shone, "you have been foolish, and wasted your chances. You have not been very bad. Thank God that you are pure and don't drink. God bless you – go out and prosper, keep innocence; now good-bye, good-bye"; and he made the sign of the cross in the air.

Gobion got outside somehow, feeling rather unwell. He did not feel particularly pleased with his success at first, but the sun, and the crowd of people, and the wonderful irrepressible gaiety of the High just before lunch on a fine day cheered him up; and he cashed the second cheque, enjoying the look of surprise on the clerk's face, which was an unusual thing, because bank clerks, though always discourteous, are seldom surprised.

Then he went back to college and packed his portmanteau.

He left most of his books, and took only clothes and things that did not require much room. Scott would send up the heavy things after him. He told his scout he was going down for a few days, and that Mr. Scott of Merton would forward all letters. He knew that if his intended departure became known his creditors would rush to the Rector, and he would probably be detained.

He lingered over lunch, making an excellent meal, drinking a good deal of brandy, and thinking over the position. As far as he could see things were not so very bad; he could probably earn enough by journalism to keep him, and he had forty-five pounds in his pocket, while the pleasures of London awaited him.

He lay back in an armchair, taking deep draughts of hot cigarette smoke into his lungs, smiling at the idea of his morning's work, and wondering how he had done it – analyzing and dissecting his own fascination.

It is a curious thing that the more evil we are the more intensely we are absorbed in our own personality. The clever scoundrel is always an egotist; and Gobion liked nothing better than to admire himself quietly and dispassionately.

Leaning back half asleep, looking lazily at the purring, spitting fire, his thoughts turned swiftly into memories, and a vista of the last few years opened up before him.

He saw himself a boy of fifteen, keenly sensitive and inordinately vain. He remembered how his eager hunger for admiration had led him to pose even to his father and mother; how, when he found out he was clever, he used to lie carefully to conceal his misdoings from them. Gradually and slowly he had grown more evil and more bitter at the narrowness which misunderstood him.

When love had gone the deterioration was more marked, and he threw himself into grossness. His imagination was too quick and vivid to let him live in vice wholly without remorse, and every now and again he wildly and passionately confessed his sins and turned his back on them, as he thought, for ever. Then after a week or two the emotional fervour of repentance would wear off, and he would plunge more deeply into vice, and lead a jolly, wicked life.

But keenest and most poignant of all his memories were the quiet summer evenings with Scott or Taylor, when the windows were open, and the long days sank gently into painted evenings. It was at times like these, when all the charm and mellow beauty of evening floating down on the ancient town

of spires sensuously bade him forget the life he was leading, and thrilled all the poetry and fervour in him, that he would talk simply and beautifully, and stir his friends into a passion of enthusiasm by his ideals. The gloriousness of youth bound them all together, and in the summer quiet of some old-world college garden the wolf and the lambs held sweet converse, generally in the chosen language of that university exclusiveness which is at once so pretty and so delightful, so impotent, and yet full of possibilities. Detached scenes rose up ... the almost painful æsthetic pleasure he had felt when he had gone to evensong at Magdalen with Scott, and the scent of the summer seemed to penetrate and be felt through the solemn singing and sonorous booming of the lessons.

... The High by moonlight – the most fairy-like scene in Europe. Scott's arm in his, and the grey towers shimmering in the quivering moonspun air.

A black cloud of horror and despair came down on him. He saw himself as he was. For once he dared to look at his own evil heart, and no light came to him in that dark hour.

A little before half-past five, nine or ten men stood on the platform of the Great Western station talking together.

A group of what Gobion called the "good" set had come to see him go.

They stood round, sorrowfully pressing him to write and let them know how he got on.

Fleming went to the bookstall and bought a great bundle of papers and magazines, and Scott appeared at the door of the refreshment-room laden with sandwiches and a flask of sherry.

They shook hands all round; it was the last time most of them saw him. Sadly they said good-bye, and took a last look at his clear-cut face.

Scott claimed the last adieu, and leant into the carriage, pressing Gobion's hand, afraid to speak. Gobion felt a horrible remorse, but he choked down his emotion by an enormous effort of will.

The train began to move.

"God bless you, God bless you, old un," said Scott hoarsely.

"An epithet is the conclusion of a syllogism," said Gobion to himself, lighting a cigarette as the train glided out of the station.

So he went his way, and they saw him no more.

CHAPTER III

INITIATION

Gobion went to the Grosvenor Hotel and dressed for dinner. Never before had he been so free, so unrestrained. A most pleasurable feeling of excitement possessed him.

He knew he could venture where another man would fail; he had fascination, resource – he was utterly unscrupulous; it was almost pleasingly dramatic.

He stood in the hall after dinner and lit a cigarette, watching the crowd of well-dressed people on the lounges round the wall, enjoying their after-dinner coffee.

The excellent dinner he had eaten still wanted the final climax of coffee, and sitting down in an armchair he ordered some.

The dreamy content of a well-fed, but not over-fed, man beamed from him. What should he do? – a music-hall perhaps – he could almost have laughed aloud in pure amusement and delight at his freedom.

A man sitting near asked him for a match, and they began to talk in the idle desultory way of two chance acquaintances, making remarks about the people sitting round.

A big, yellow-haired girl was talking and laughing in loud tones on the other side of the room, clattering her fan with, it seemed to Gobion, quite unnecessary noise.

"Who is that person?" he said.

"Which?"

"The girl with the bun, by the potted palm."

"Oh," said the stranger, "that is Lady Mary Aiden Hibbert; she is of a rather buoyant disposition."

"Not to say *Tom* buoyant," said Gobion, punning lazily; "she seems of an amiable complexion."

"My dear sir, complexion of both kinds is influenced by cosmetics, not by character."

"I perceive you are a cynic."

"Possibly," said the other in a meditative tone; "yet not so much of a cynic as a man in quest of sensations."

"A society journalist?"

"No, merely a man who has become tired of the higher immorality, and wants something else to do."

Gobion laughed and got up. "I'm going to the Palace for an hour or two."

"May I come?" said the stranger; "my name is Jones."

"Please do. I am called Yardly Gobion. I shouldn't like to be called Jones, it's not a pretty name."

The other smiled, he was not vexed; Gobion knew his man. They drove swiftly to the Palace through the lighted streets, talking a little on the way. When they went into the stalls the hysterio-comic of the hour was leaping round the stage in frenzied pirouettes between the verses of her song.

The suggestive music of the dance pulsed through the audience, and when the time sank into the rhythm of the verse, they sat back in their seats with expectant eyes, and a little sigh of delight and anticipation.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.