

Thorne Guy

# When It Was Dark: The Story of a Great Conspiracy



Guy Thorne

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**Thorne Guy**  
**When It Was Dark: The**  
**Story of a Great Conspiracy**

**BOOK I**

**"The mystery of iniquity doth already work."**

## CHAPTER I

### AN INCIDENT BY WAY OF PROLOGUE

Mr. Hinchcliffe, the sexton, looked up as Mr. Philemon, the clerk, unlocked the great gates of open ironwork which led into the street. Hinchcliffe was cutting the lettering on a tombstone, supported by heavy wooden trestles, under a little shed close to the vestry door of the church.

The clerk, a small, rotund man, clerical in aspect, and wearing a round felt hat, pulled out a large, old-fashioned watch. "Time for the bell, William," he said.

The parish church was a large building in sham perpendicular. It stood in a very central position on the Manchester main road, rising amid a bare triangle of flat gravestones, and separated from the street pavement only by high iron railings.

It was about half-past four on a dull autumn afternoon. The trams swung ringing down the black, muddy road, and the long procession of great two-wheeled carts, painted vermilion, carried coal from the collieries six miles away to the great mills and factories of Salford.

The two men went into the church, and soon the tolling of a deep-voiced bell, high up in the pall of smoke which lay over the houses, beat out in regular and melancholy sound.

Inside the building the noise of the traffic sank into a long, unceasing note like the *bourdon* note of a distant organ.

Hinchcliffe tolled the bell in the dim, ugly vestibule with his foot in a loop in the rope, sitting on the chest which held the dozen loaves which were given away every Sunday to the old women in the free seats.

The clerk opened the green baize swing-doors and strode up the aisle towards the vestry, waking mournful echoes as the nails in his boots struck the tiled floor.

Saint Thomas's Church, the mother church of Walktown, was probably the ugliest church in Lancashire. The heavy galleries, the drab walls, the terrible gloom of the vast structure, all spoke eloquently of a chilly, dour Christianity, a grudging and suspicious Sunday religion which animated its congregation.

In the long rows of cushioned seats, each labelled with the name of the person who rented it, Sunday by Sunday the moderately prosperous and wholly vulgar Lancashire people sat for two hours. During the prayers they leaned forward in easy and comfortable concession to convention. Few ever knelt. During the hymn times they stood up in their places listening carefully to a fine choir of men and women – a choir which, despite its vocal excellence, was only allowed to perform the most stodgy and commonplace evangelical music.

When the incumbent preached he was heard with the jealous watchfulness which often assails an educated man. The renters of the pews desired a Low Church aspect of doctrine and were intelligent to detect any divergence from it.

The colour of the building was sombre. The brick-red and styx-like grey of the flooring, the lifeless chocolate front of the galleries, the large and ugly windows filled with glass which was the colour of a ginger-beer bottle, had all a definite quality of cheerless vulgarity.

Philemon came out of the vestry door with a lighted taper. He lit two or three jets of the corona over the reading-desk. Then he sat down in a front pew close to the chancel steps and waited.

The bell outside stopped suddenly, and a tall young man in a black Inverness cape walked hurriedly up the side aisle under the gallery towards the vestry.

In less than a minute he came out again in surplice, stole, and hood, – the stole and hood were always worn at Walktown, – went to the reading-desk, and began to say Evensong in a level, resonant voice.

At the end of each psalm Mr. Philemon recited the doxology with thunderous assertion and capped each prayer with an echoing "Amen."

The curate, Basil Gortre, was a young fellow with a strong, impressive face. His eyes had the clearness of youth and looked out steadily on the world under his black hair. His face was of that type men call a "thoroughly honest" face, but, unlike the generality of such faces, it was neither stubborn nor stupid. The clean-shaven jaw was full of power, the mouth was refined and, artistic, without being either sensual or weak.

During the Creed he turned towards the east, and the clerk's uncompromising voice became louder and more acid as he noticed the action; and when the clergyman, almost imperceptibly, made the sign of the Cross at the words "The resurrection of the body," the old man gave a loud snort of disapprobation.

In deference to the congregation on Sundays, and at the wish of his vicar, Gortre omitted these simple signs of reverence. But alone, at Matins or Evensong, he followed his usual habit.

During the last low prayers, as dusk crept into the great church, and the clank and bells of the trams outside seemed to be more remote, a part, indeed, of that visible but not symbolic ugliness which the gloom was hiding, a note of fervour crept into the young man's praying which had only been latent there before.

He was reading the third collect when the few gas jets above his head began to whistle, burnt blue for a few seconds, and then faded out with three or four faint pops.

Some air had got into the pipes. Old Mr. Philemon rose noisily from his knees, and shuffled off to the vestry coughing and spluttering. Outside, with startling suddenness, a piano organ burst into a gay, strident melody. After a few bars the music stopped with a jerk. A police constable had spoken to the organ-grinder and moved him on.

Gortre's voice went on in a deep, fervent monotone, unmoved by the darkness or the dissonance

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"Lighten our darkness, we beseech Thee, O Lord; and by Thy great mercy  
defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of Thy only Son,  
our Saviour Jesus Christ."

The faithful, quiet voice, enduring through the dark, was a foreshadowing of the great cloud which was breaking over the world, big with disaster, imminent with gloom. It foreshadowed the divinely aided continuance of Truth through such a terror as men had never known before.

It meant many things, that firm and beautiful voice – hope in the darkest hour for thousands of dying souls, a noble woman's happiness in time of dire stress and evil temptations and a death worse than the death Judas died – for Mr. Schuabe the millionaire and Robert Llwelllyn the scholar, taking tea together in the Athenæum Club three hundred miles away in London.

" —by Thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night."

Mr. Philemon returned with a taper, an old and wrinkled acolyte, in time with his loud and sonorous AMEN.

## CHAPTER II

### IN THE VICAR'S STUDY

The vicarage of Walktown was a new and commodious house with tall chimneys, pointed windows, and a roof of red tiles.

It was more than a mile from the church, in the residential quarter of the town. Here were no shops and little traffic. The solid houses of red brick stood in their own rather dingy grounds, where, though the grass was never really green, and spring came in a veil of smoky vapour when the wind blew from the town, there was yet a rural suggestion.

The trees rose from neatly kept lawns, the gravel sweeps of the drives were carefully tended, and there was distant colour in the elaborate conservatories and palm-houses which were to be seen everywhere.

Mr. Pryde, the great Manchester solicitor, had his beautiful modern house here. Sir John Neele, the wealthy manufacturer of disinfectants, lived close by, and a large proportion of the well-to-do Manchester merchants were settled round about.

Not all of them were parishioners of Mr. Byars, the vicar of Walktown. Many attended the more fashionable church of Pendleborough, a mile away in what answered to the "country"; others were leaders in the Dissenting and especially the Unitarian worlds.

Walktown was a stronghold of the Unitarians. The wealthy Jews of two generations back, men who made vast fortunes in the black valley of the Irwell, had chosen Walktown to dwell in. Their grandsons had found it more politic to abjure their ancient faith. A few had become Christians, – at least in name, inasmuch as they rented pews at St. Thomas's, – but others had compromised by embracing a faith, or rather a dogma, which is simply Judaism without its ritual and ceremonial obligations. The Baumanns, the Hildersheimers, the Steinhardts, flourished in Walktown.

It was people of this class who supported the magnificent concerts in the Free Trade Hall at Manchester, who bought the pictures and read the books. They had brought an alien culture to the neighbourhood. The vicar had two strong elements to contend with, – for his parochial life was all contention, – on the one hand the Lancashire natives, on the other the wealthy Jewish families.

The first were hard, uncultured people, hating everything that had not its origin and end in commerce. They disliked Mr. Byars because he was a gentleman, because he was educated, and because – so they considered – the renting of the pews in his church gave them the right to imagine that he was in some sense a paid servant of theirs.

The second class of parishioners were less Philistine, certainly, but even more hopeless from the parish priest's point of view. In their luxurious houses they lived an easy, selfish, and sensual life, beyond his reach, surrounded by a wall of indifferentism, and contemptuous of all that was not tangible and material. At times the rector and the curate confessed to each other that these people seemed more utterly lost than any others with whom the work of the Church brought them in contact.

Mr. Byars was a widower with one son, now at Oxford, and one daughter, Helena, who was engaged to Basil Gortre, the curate.

About six o'clock the vicar sat in his study with a pile of letters before him. The room was a comfortable, bookish place, panelled in pitch pine where the walls were not covered with shelves of theological and philosophical works.

The arm-chairs were not new, but they invited repose; the large engraving over the pipe-littered mantel was a fine autotype of Giacomo's *St. Emilia*. The room was brightly lit with electric light.

Mr. Byars was a man of medium height, bald, his fine, domed forehead adding to his apparent age, and wore a pointed grey beard and moustache. He was an epitome of the room around him.

The volumes on his shelves were no ancient and musty tomes, but represented the latest and newest additions to theological thought.



Lathom and Edersheim stood together with Renan's *Vie de Jésus* and Clermont-Ganneau's *Recueil d'Arch. Orient*, and Westcott guarded them all.

The ivory crucifix which stood on the writing-table completed the impression of the man.

Ambrose Byars at forty-five was thoroughly acquainted with modern thought and literature. His scholarship was tempered with the wisdom of an active and clear-headed man of the world. His life and habits were simple but unbigoted, and his broad-mindedness never obscured his unalterable convictions. He lived, as he conceived it his duty to live in his time and place, in thorough human and intellectual correspondence with his environment, but one thought, one absolute certainty informed his life.

As year by year his knowledge grew greater, and the scientific criticism of the Scriptures undermined the faith of weaker and less richly endowed minds, he only found in each discovery a more vivid proof of the truth of the Incarnation and the Resurrection.

It was his habit in discussions to reconcile all apparently conflicting antichristian statements and weave them into the fabric of his convictions. He held that, even scientifically, historically, and materially, the evidence for the Resurrection was too strong to be ever overthrown. And beyond these intellectual evidences he knew that Christ must have risen from the dead, because he himself had found Christ and was found in Him.

His attitude was a careful one with all its conciseness. An anecdote illustrates this.

One day, when walking home from a meeting of the School Board, of which he was a member, he had met a parishioner named Baxter, the proprietor of a small engineering work in the district. The man, who never came to church, on what he called "principle," but spent his Sundays in bed with a sporting paper, was one of those half-educated people who condemn Christianity by ridiculing the Old Testament stories.

They walked together, Baxter quoting the *Origin of Species*, which he knew from a cheap epitomised handbook.

"Do you really think, Mr. Byars," he had said, "do you really believe, after Darwin's discovery, that we were made by a sort of conjuring trick by a Supreme Power? Seven days of cooking, so to speak, and then a world! Why, it's childish to expect thinking people to believe it. We are simply evolved by scientific evolution out of the primæval protoplasm."

"Very possibly," said the vicar; "and who made the protoplasm, Mr. Baxter?"

The man was silent for a minute. "Then, Mr. Byars," he said at length, "you do not believe the Old Testament – the Adam and Eve part, for instance. You do not believe the Book on which your creed is founded."

"There are such things as allegories," he had answered. "The untutored brain must be taught the truth in such a way as it can receive it."

The vicar lit his pipe and began to open his letters with a slight sigh. Of all men, he sometimes felt, he was the least possible one for Walktown. For twelve years he had worked there, and he seemed to make little headway. He longed for an educated congregation. Here methods too vulgar for his temperament seemed to be the only ones.

The letters were all from applicants for the curacy which Gortre's impending departure would shortly leave vacant.

"It will be a terrible wrench to lose Basil," he said to himself; "but it must be. He will have his chance and be far happier in London, in more congenial environment. He would never be a great success in Walktown. He has tried nobly, but the people won't understand him. They would never like him; he's too much of a gentleman. How they all hate breeding in Walktown! There is nothing for it, I can see. I must get an inferior man this time. An inferior man will go down with them better here. I only hope he will be a really good fellow. If he isn't, it will be Jerrold over again – vulgar cabals against me, and all the women in the place quarrelling and taking sides."

He read letter after letter, and saw, with a humorous shrug of disgust, that he would have little difficulty in engaging the "inferior" man of his thoughts.

The best men would not come to the North. Men of family with decent degrees, Oxford men, Cambridge men, accustomed to decent society and intellectual friends, knew far too much to accept a title in the Manchester district.

The applications were numerous enough, but obviously from second-rate men, or at any rate from men who appeared to be so at first glance.

A Durham graduate, 40, with five children, begged earnestly for the £120 a year which was all Mr. Byars could offer. A few young men from theological colleges wanting titles, a Dublin B.A., announcing himself as "thoroughly Protestant in views" – they were a weary lot. A non-collegiate student from Oxford with a second class in Theology, a Manchester Grammar-School boy, whose father lived at Higher Broughton, seemed to promise the best. He would be able to get on with the people, probably. "I suppose I must have him, accent and all," the vicar said with a sigh, "though I suppose it's prejudice to dislike the lessons read with the Lancashire broad 'a' and short 'o.' St. Paul probably spoke with a terrible local twang! and yet, I don't know, he was too great to be vulgar; one doesn't like to think that – "

Mr. Byars was certainly a difficult person for his congregation to appreciate.

He picked up the letter and was re-reading it when the door opened and his daughter came in.

Helena Byars was a tall girl, largely made and yet slender. Her hair was luxuriant and of a traditional "heroine" gold. She was dressed with a certain richness, though soberly enough, a style which, with its slight hint of austerity, accentuated a quiet and delicate charm. So one felt on meeting her for the first time. Sweet-faced she was and with an underlying seriousness even in her times of laughter. Her mouth was rather large, her nose straight and beautifully chiselled. The eyes were placid, intelligent, but without keenness. There was an almost matronly dignity about her quiet and yet decided manner.

The vicar looked up at her with a smile, thinking how like her mother the girl was – that grave and gracious lady who looked out of the picture by the door, St. Cecilia in form and face. "Eh, but Helena she favours her mother," Hinchcliffe, the sexton, had said with the frank familiarity of the Lancashire workman soon after Mrs. Byars's funeral four years ago.

"I've brought *Punch*, father," she said, "it's just come. Leave your work now and enjoy yourself for half an hour before dinner. Basil will be here by the time you're finished."

She stirred the fire into a bright glow, and, singing softly to herself, left the study and went into the dining-room to see that the table looked inviting for the coming meal.

About seven o'clock Gortre arrived, and soon afterwards the three sat down to dine. It was a simple meal, some fish, cold beef, and a pudding, with a bottle of beer for the curate and a glass of claret for the vicar. The housemaid did not wait upon them, for they found the meal more intimate and enjoyable without her.

"I've got some news," said Gortre. "The great question of domicile is settled. You know there is no room in the clergy-house at St. Mary's. Moreover, Father Ripon thought it well that I should live outside. He wanted one of the assistant clergy, at least, to be in constant touch with lay influences, he said when I saw him."

"What have you arranged, dear?" said Helena.

"Something very satisfactory, I think," he answered. "My first thought was to take ordinary rooms in Bloomsbury. It would be near St. Mary's and the schools. Then I thought of chambers in one of the Inns of Court. At any rate I wrote to Harold Spence to ask his advice. He was at Merton with me, you know, lived on the same staircase in 'Stubbins,' and is just one of the best fellows in the world. We haven't corresponded much during the last three years, but I knew a letter to the New Oxford and Cambridge would always find him. So I wrote up. He's been University Extension lecturing for

a time, you know, and writing too. Now he tells me that he is writing leaders for the *Daily Wire* and doing very well. I'll read you what he says."

He took a letter from his pocket, glanced down it for the paragraph he wanted, and began to read:

... " – and I am delighted to hear that you have at last made up your mind to leave the North country and have accepted this London curacy. I asked Marsh, our ecclesiastical editor, about St. Mary's last night. He tells me that it is a centre of very important Church work, and has some political and social influence. Of all the 'ritualistic' parishes – I use the word as a convenient label – it is thought to be the sanest. Here you will have a real chance. I know something of the North, and came in contact with all sorts and conditions of people when I was lecturing on the French Revolution round Liverpool and Manchester for the Extension. They are not the people for you to succeed with, either socially or from a clergyman's point of view – at least, that's my opinion, old man. You ask me about rooms. I have a proposal to make to you in this regard. I am now living in Lincoln's Inn with a man named Hands – Cyril Hands. You may know his name. He is a great archæologist, was a young Cambridge professor. For three years now he has been working for The Palestine Exploring Society. He is in charge of all the excavations now proceeding near Jerusalem, and constantly making new and valuable Biblical discoveries."

The vicar broke in upon the reading. "Hands!" he said; "a most distinguished man! His work is daily adding to our knowledge in a marvellous way. He has just recently discovered some important inscriptions at El-Edhamîyeh – Jeremiah's grotto, you know, the place which is thought may be Golgotha, you know. But go on, I'm sorry to interrupt."

Gortre continued:

"Hands is only at home for three months in the year, when he comes to the annual meeting of the Society and recuperates at the seaside. His rooms, however, are always kept for him. The chambers we have are old-fashioned but very large. There are three big bedrooms, a huge sitting-room, two smaller rooms and a sort of kitchen, all inside the one oak. I have a bedroom and one small room where I write. Hands has only one bedroom and uses the big general room. Now if you care to come and take up your abode in the Inn with us, I can only say you will be heartily welcome. Your share of the expenses would be less than if you lived alone in rooms as you propose, and you would be far more comfortable. You could have your study to work in. Our laundress is nearly always about, and there is altogether a pleasant suggestion of Oxford and the old days in the life we lead. Of course I need hardly tell you that we are very quiet and quite untroubled by any of the rowdy people, all of whom live away from our court altogether. You would be only five minutes' walk from St. Mary's. What do you think of the idea? Let me know and I will give you all further details. I hope you will decide on joining us. I should find it most pleasant. – Ever yours,

*"Harold Masterman Spence."*

"An extremely genial letter," said the vicar. "I suppose you'll accept, Basil? It will be pleasant to be with friends like that."

"Isn't it just a little, well, bachelor?" said Helena rather nervously.

Gortre smiled at the question.

"No, dear," he said. "I don't think you need be afraid. I know the sort of visions you have. The sort of thing in *Pendennis*, isn't it? The boy sent out for beer to the nearest public-house, and breakfast at twelve in the morning, cooked in the sitting-room. You don't know Harold. He is quite *bourgeois*

in his habits, despite his intellect, hates a muddle, always dresses extremely well, and goes to church like any married man. He was a great friend of the Pusey House people at Oxford."

"The days when you couldn't be a genius without being dirty are gone," said the vicar. "I am glad of it. I was staying at St. Ives last summer, where there is quite an artistic settlement. All the painters carried golf-clubs and looked like professional athletes. They drink Bohea in Bohemia now."

Gortre talked a little about his plans for the future. He had a sympathetic audience. During the four years of his curacy at Walktown he had become very dear to Mr. Byars. He had arrived in the North from Oxford, after a year at Litchfield Theological College, just about the time that Mrs. Byars had died. His help and sympathy at such a time had begun a friendship with his vicar that had been firmly cemented as the time went on, and had finally culminated in his engagement to Helena. He had been the vicar's sole intellectual companion all this time, and his loss would be irreparable. But both men felt that his departure was inevitable. The younger man's powers were stifled and confined in the atmosphere of the place. He had private means of his own, and belonged to an old West-country family, and, try as he would he failed to identify himself socially with the Walktown people. His engagement to Helena Byars had increased his unpopularity. He would be far happier at St. Mary's in London, at the famous High Church, where he would find all those exterior accompaniments of religion to which he had been accustomed, and which, though he did not exalt the shadow into the substance, always made him happier when he was surrounded by them.

He was to wait a year and then he would be married. There were no money obstacles in the way and no reason for further delay. Only the vicar looked forward with a sort of horror to his future loneliness, and tried to put the thought from him whenever it came.

After dinner Helena left the two men to smoke alone in the study. There was a concert in the Town Hall to which she was going with Mrs. Pryde, the solicitor's wife, a neighbour. Her friend's carriage called for her about eight, and Gortre settled down for a long talk with the vicar on parochial affairs.

They sat on each side of the dancing fire, with coffee on a table between them, quietly enjoying the after-dinner pipe, the best and finest of the five cardinal pipes of the day. It was a comfortable scene. The room was lighted only by a single electric reading-lamp with a green shade, and the firelight flickered and played over the dull gold and crimson of the books on the shelves, and threw red lights on the shining ivory of the sculptured Christ.

"I daresay this North-country man will do all right," said the vicar. "He will be more popular than you, Basil."

The young man sighed. "God knows I have tried hard enough to win their confidence," he said sadly, "but it was not to be. I *can't* get in touch with them, vicar. They dislike my manners, my way of speaking – everything about me. Even the landlady of my rooms distrusts me because I decline to take tea with my evening chop, and charges me three shillings a week extra because I have what she calls 'late dinner'!"

The vicar laughed. "At any rate," he said, "you have got hold of Leef, your landlord; he comes to church regularly now."

"Oh, Leef illustrates more than any one else how impossible it is, for me, at any rate, to do much good. Last week he said to me, 'It's a fine thing, religion, when you've got it at last, Mr. Gortre. When I look back at my unregenerate years I wonder at myself. Religion tells me to give up certain things. It only 'armonises with the experience of any sensible man of my age. I don't want to drink too much, for instance. My health is capital, and I'm not such a fool as to spoil it. To think that all those years I never knew that religion was as easy as winking, and with a certainty of everlasting glory afterwards. I'll always back you up, Mr. Gortre, in saying that religion's the finest thing out.'"

"Well, dear boy, you will be in another environment altogether soon. It's no use being discouraged. *Tot homines, quot sententiæ!* We can't alter these things. The Essenes used to speak disrespectfully enough of 'Ye men of Galilee,' no doubt. Sometimes I think I would rather have these

stubborn people than those of the South, men as easy and *commode* as an old glove, and worth about as much. Have you seen the *Guardian* to-day?"

"No, I haven't. I've been at the schools all the morning, visiting in Timperley Street till Evensong, home for a wash, and then here."

"I see Schuabe is going to address a great meeting in the Free Trade Hall on the Education Bill."

"Then he is at Mount Prospect?"

"He arrived from London yesterday."

The two men looked at each other in silence. Mr. Byars seemed ill at ease. His foot tapped the brass rail of the fender. Then, a sure sign of disturbance with him, he put down his pipe, which was nearly smoked away, and took a cigarette from a box on the table and smoked in short, quick puffs.

Gortre's face became dark and gloomy. The light died out of it, the kindliness of expression, which was habitual, left his eyes.

"We have never really told each other what we think of Schuabe and how we think of him, vicar," he said. "Let us have it out here and now while we are thinking of him and while we have the opportunity."

"In a question of this sort," said Mr. Byars, "confidences are extremely dangerous as a rule, but between you and me it is different. It will clear our brains mutually. God forbid that you and I, in our profession as Christ's priests and our socio-political position as clerks in Holy Orders, should bear rancour against any one. But we are but human. Possibly our mutual confidence may help us both."

There was a curious eagerness in his manner which was reflected by that of the other. Both were conscious of feelings ill in accord with their usual open and kindly attitude towards the world. Each was anxious to know if the other coincided with himself.

Men are weak, and there is comfort in community.

"From envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness – " said Gortre.

"Good Lord deliver us," replied the vicar gravely.

There was a tense silence for a time, only broken by the dropping of the coals in the grate. The vicar was the first to break it.

"I'll sum up my personal impression of the man for and against," he said.

Gortre nodded.

"There can be no doubt whatever," said Mr. Byars, "that among all the great North-country millionaires – men of power and influence, I mean – Schuabe stands first and pre-eminent. His wealth is enormous to begin with. Then he is young – can hardly be forty yet, I should say. He belongs to the new generation. In Walktown he stands entirely alone. Then his brilliancy, his tremendous intellectual powers, are equalled by few men in England. His career at Oxford was marvellous, his political life, only just beginning as it is, seems to promise the very highest success. His private life, as far as we know – and everything about the man seems to point to an ascetic temperament and a refined habit – is without grossness or vice of any kind. In appearance he is one of the ten most striking-looking men in England. His manners are fascinating."

Gortre laughed shortly, a mirthless, bitter laugh.

"So far," he said, "you have drawn a picture which approaches the ideal of what a strong man should be. And I grant you every detail of it. But let me complete it. You will agree with me that mine also is true."

His voice trembled a little. Half unconsciously his eyes wandered to the crucifix on the writing-table. In the red glow of the fire, which had now ceased to crackle and flame, the drooping figure on the cross showed distinct and clear in all its tremendous appeal to the hearts of mankind. Tears came into the young man's eyes, his face became drawn and pained. When he spoke, his voice was full of purpose and earnestness.

"Yes," he said, with an unusual gesture of the hand, "Schuabe is all that you say. In a hard, godless, and material age he is an epitome of it. The curse of indifferentism is over the land. Men

have forgotten that this world is but an inn, a sojourning place for a few hours. O fools and blind! The terror of death is always with them. But this man is far more than this – far, far more. To him has been given the eye to see, the heart to understand. *He, of all men living in England to-day, is the mailed, armed enemy of Our Lord.* No loud-mouthed atheist, sincere and blatant in his ignorance, no honest searcher after truth. All his great wealth, all his attainments, are forged into one devilish weapon. He is already, and will be in the future, the great enemy of Christianity. Oh, I have read his book! 'Even now there are many antichrists.' I have read his speeches in Parliament. I know his enormous influence over those unhappy people who call themselves 'Secularists.' Like Diocletian, like Julian, *he hates Christ.* He is no longer a Jew. Judaism is nothing to him – one can reverence a Montefiore, admire an Adler. His attacks on the faith are something quite different to those of other men. As his skill is greater, so his intention is more evil. And yet how helpless are we who know! The mass of Christians – the lax, tolerant Christians – think he is a kind of John Morley. They praise his charities, his efforts for social amelioration. They quote, 'And God fulfils Himself in many ways.' I say again, O fools and blind! They do not know, they cannot see, this man as he is at heart, accursed and antichrist!" His voice dropped, tired with its passion and vehemence. He continued in a lower and more intimate vein:

"Do you think I am a fanatic, vicar? Am I touched with monomania when I tell you that of late I have thought much upon the prophetic indications of the coming of 'the Man of Sin,' the antichrist in Holy Writ? Can it be, I have asked myself, as I watch the comet-like brilliance of this man's career, can it be that in my own lifetime and the lifetime of those I love, the veritable enemy of our Saviour is to appear? Is this man, this Jew, he of whom it is said in Jacob's words, 'Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path' – the tribe of which *not one* was sealed?"

"You are overwrought, Basil," said the elder man kindly. "You have let yourself dwell too much on this man and his influences. But I do not condemn you. I also have had my doubts and wonderings. The outside world would laugh at us and people who might be moved as we are at these things. But do we not live always with, and by help of, the Unseen? God alone knows the outcome of the trend of these antichristian influences, of which, I fear, Schuabe is the head. The Fathers are clear enough on the subject, and the learned men of mediæval times also. Let me read to you."

He got up from his arm-chair, glad, it seemed, at opportunity of change and movement, and went to the book-shelves which lined the wall. His scholar's interest was aroused, his magnificent reading and knowledge of Christian history and beliefs engaged and active.

He dipped into book after book, reading extracts from them here and there.

"Listen. Marchantius says the ship of the Church will sink and be lost in the foam of infidelity, and be hidden in the blackness of that storm of desolation which shall arise at the coming of Antichrist. 'The sun shall be darkened and the stars shall fall from heaven.' He means, of course, the sun of faith, and that the stars, the great ecclesiastical dignitaries, shall fall into apostasy. But, he goes on to say, the Church will remain unwrecked, she will weather the storm and come forth '*beautiful as the moon, terrible as an army with banners.*'"

His voice was eager and excited, his face was all alight with the scholar's eagerness, as he took down book after book with unerring instinct to illustrate his remarks.

"Opinions as to the nature and personality of Antichrist have been very varied," he continued. "Some of the very early Christian writers say he will be a devil in a phantom body, others that he will be an incarnate demon, true man and true devil, in fearful and diabolic parody of the Incarnation of our Lord. There is a third view also. That is that he will be merely a desperately wicked man, acting upon diabolic inspirations, just as the saints act upon Divine inspirations.

"Listen to St. John Damascene upon the subject. He is very express. 'Not as Christ assumed humanity, so will the Devil become human; but the Man will receive all the inspiration of Satan, and will suffer the Devil to take up his abode within him.'"

Gortre, who was listening with extreme attention, made a short, sharp exclamation at this last quotation.

He had risen from his seat and stood by the mantel-shelf, leaning his elbow upon it.

One of the ornaments of the mantel was a head of Christ, photographed on china, from Murillo, and held in a large silver frame like a photograph frame.

Just as the vicar had finished reading there came a sudden knock at the door. It startled Gortre, and he moved suddenly. His elbow slid along the marble of the shelf and dislodged the picture, which fell upon the floor and was broken into a hundred pieces, crashing loudly upon the fender.

The housemaid, who had knocked, stood for a moment looking with dismay upon the breakage. Then she turned to the vicar.

"Mr. Schuabe from Mount Prospect to see you, sir," she said. "I've shown him into the drawing-room."

## CHAPTER III

### "I THINK HE IS A GOOD MAN"

The servant had turned on the lights in the drawing room, where a low fire still glowed red upon the hearth, and left Constantine Schuabe alone to await the vicar's arrival.

On either side of the fireplace were heavy hangings of emerald and copper woven stuff, a present to Helena from an uncle, who had bought them at Benares. Schuabe stood motionless before this background.

The man was tall, above the middle height, and the heavy coat of fur which he was wearing increased the impression of proportioned size, of massiveness, which was part of his personality. His hair was a very dark red, smooth and abundant, of that peculiar colour which is the last to show the greyness of advancing age. His features were Semitic, but without a trace of that fulness, and sometimes coarseness, which often marks the Jew who has come to the middle period of life. The eyes were large and black, but without animation, in ordinary use and wont. They did not light up as he spoke, but yet the expression was not veiled or obscured. They were coldly, terribly *aware*, with something of the sinister and untroubled regard one sees in a reptile's eyes.

The jaw, which dominated the face and completed its remarkable *ensemble*, was very massive, reminding people of steel covered with olive-coloured parchment. Handsome was hardly the word which fitted him. He was a strikingly handsome man; but that, like "distinction," was only one of the qualities which made up his personality. Force, power – the relentless and conscious power suggested by some great marine engine – surrounded him in an almost indescribable way. They were like exhalations. Most people, with the casual view, called him merely indomitable, but there were others who thought they read deeper and saw something evil and monstrous about the man; powerless to give an exact and definite reason for the impression, and dubious of voicing it.

Nevertheless, now and again, two or three people would speak of him to each other without reserve, and on such occasions they generally agreed to this feeling of the sinister and malign, in much the same manner as the vicar and his curate had been agreeing but half an hour before his arrival at the house.

The door opened with a quick click of the handle, and the vicar entered with something of suddenness. One might almost have supposed that he had lingered, hesitant, in the hall, and suddenly nerved himself for this encounter.

Mr. Byars advanced to take the hand of his visitor. Beside the big man he seemed shrunken and a little ineffectual. He was slightly nervous in his manner also, for Basil's impassioned and terror-ridden words still rang in his ears and had their way with him.

The coincidence of the millionaire's arrival was altogether too sudden and *bizarre*.

When they had made greetings, cordial enough on the surface, and were seated on either side of the fire, Schuabe spoke at once upon the object of his visit.

"I have come, Mr. Byars," he said, in a singularly clear, vibrant voice, "to discuss certain educational proposals with you. As you probably know, just at present I am taking a very prominent part in the House of Commons in connection with the whole problem of primary education. Within the last few weeks I have been in active correspondence with your School Board, and you will know all about the scholarships I have founded.

"But I am now coming to you to propose something of the same sort in connection with your own Church schools. My opinions on religious matters are, of course, not yours. But despite my position I have always recognised that, with whatever means, both the clergy and my own party are broadly working towards one end.

"Walktown provides me with very many thousands a year, and it is my duty in some way or another to help Walktown. My proposal is roughly this: I will found and endow two yearly scholarships



for two boys in the national schools. The money will be sufficient, in the first instance, to send them to one of the great Northern Grammar Schools, and afterwards, always providing that the early promise is maintained, to either university.

"My only stipulation is this. The tests shall be purely and simply intellectual, and have nothing whatever to do with the religious teaching of the schools, with which I am not in sympathy. Nevertheless, it is only fair that a clever boy in a Church school should have the same opportunities as in a secular school. I should tell you that I have made the same offer to the Roman Catholic school authorities and it has been declined."

The vicar listened with great attention. The offer was extremely generous, and showed a most open-minded determination to put the donor's personal prejudices out of the question. There could be no doubt as to his answer – none whatever.

"My dear sir," he said, "your generosity is very great. I see your point about the examinations. Religion is to form no part of them exactly. But by the time one of our boys submits himself for examination we should naturally hope that he would already be so firmly fixed in Christian principles that his after-career would have no influence upon his faith. Holding the opinions that you do, your offer shows a great freedom from any prejudice. I hope I am broad-minded enough to recognise that philanthropy is a fine, lovely thing, despite the banner under which the philanthropist may stand. I accept your generous offer in the spirit that it is made. Of course, the scheme must be submitted to the managers of the schools, of whom I am chief, but the matter practically lies with me, and my lead will be followed."

"I am only too glad," said the big man, with a sudden and transforming smile, "to help on the cause of knowledge. All the details of the scheme I will send you in a few days, and now I will detain you no longer."

He rose to go.

During their brief conversation the vicar had been conscious of many emotions. He blamed himself for his narrowness and the somewhat fantastic lengths to which his recent talk with Gortre had gone. The man was an infidel, no doubt. His intellectual attacks upon Christian faith were terribly damaging and subversive. Still, his love for his fellow-men was sincere, it seemed. He attacked the faith, but not the preachers of it. And – a half thought crossed his brain – he might have been sent to him for some good purpose. St. Paul had not always borne the name of Paul!

These thoughts, but half formulated in his brain, had their immediate effect in concrete action.

"Won't you take off your coat, Mr. Schuabe," he said, "and smoke a cigar with me in my study?"

The other hesitated a moment, looked doubtful, and then assented. He hung his coat up in the hall and went into the other room with the vicar.

During the conversation in the drawing-room Helena had come back from the concert, and Basil, hearing her, had left the study and gone to her own private sanctum for a last few minutes before saying good-night.

Helena sat in a low chair by the fire sipping a bowl of soup which the maid had brought up to her. She was a little tired by the concert, where a local pianist had been playing a nocturne of Chopin's as if he wanted to make it into soup, and the quiet of her own sitting-room, the intimate comfort of it all, and the sense of happiness that Basil's presence opposite gave her were in delightful contrast.

"It was very stupid, dear," she said. "Mrs. Pryde was rather trying, full of dull gossip about every one, and the music wasn't good. Mr. Cuthbert played as if he was playing the organ in church. His touch is utterly unfitted for anything except the War March from *Athalie* with the stops out. He knows nothing of the piano. I was in a front seat, and I could see his knee feeling for the swell all the time. He played *the* sonata as if he was throwing the moonlight at one in great solid chunks. I'm glad to be back. How nice it is to sit here with you, dearest! – and how good this Bovril is!" she concluded with a little laugh of content and happiness at this moment of acute physical and mental ease.

He looked lovingly at her as she lay back in rest and the firelight played over her white arms and pale gold hair.

"It's wonderful to think," he said, with a little catch in his voice, "it's wonderful to me, an ever-recurring wonder, to think that some day you and I will always be together for all our life, here and afterwards. What supreme, unutterable happiness God gives to His children! Do you know, dear, sometimes as I read prayers or stand by the altar, I am filled with a sort of rapture of thankfulness which is voiceless in its intensity. Tennyson got nearer to expressing it than any one in that beautiful *St. Agnes' Eve* of his – a little gem which, with its simplicity and fervour, is worth far more than Keats's poem with all its literary art."

"It is good to feel like that sometimes," she answered; "but it is well, I think, not to get into the way of *inducing* such feelings. The human brain is such a sensitive thing that one can get into the way of drugging it with emotion, as it were. I think I am tinged a little with the North-country spirit. I always think of Newman's wonderful lines —

""The thoughts control that o'er thee swell and throng;  
They will condense within the soul and turn to purpose strong.  
But he who lets his feelings run in soft luxurious flow,  
Shrinks when hard service must be done, and faints at every blow.'"

I only quote from memory. But you look tired, dear boy; you are rather white. Have you been overworking?"

He did not answer immediately.

"No," he said slowly, "but I've been having a long talk with the vicar. We were talking about Mr. Schuabe and his influence. Helena, that man is the most active of God's enemies in England. Almost when I was mentioning his name, by some coincidence, or perhaps for some deeper, more mysterious, psychical reason which men do not yet understand, the maid announced him. He had come to see your father on business, and – don't think I am unduly fanciful – the Murillo photograph, the head of Christ, on the mantel-shelf, fell down and was broken. He is here still, I think."

"Yes," said Helena; "Mr. Schuabe is in the study with father. But, Basil dear, it's quite evident to me that you've been doing too much. Do you know that I look upon Mr. Schuabe as a really *good* man! I have often thought about him, and even prayed that he may learn the truth; but God has many instruments. Mr. Schuabe is sincere in his unbelief. His life and all his actions are for the good of others. It is terrible – it is deplorable – to know he attacks Christianity; but he is tolerant and large-minded also. Yes, I should call him a good man. He will come to God some day. God would not have given him such power over the minds and bodies of men otherwise."

Gortre smiled a little sadly, – a rather wan smile, which sat strangely upon his strong and hearty face – , but he said no more.

He knew that his attitude was illogical, perhaps it could be called bigoted and intolerant – a harsh indictment in these easy, latitudinarian days; but his conviction was an intuition. It came from within, from something outside or beyond his reason, and would not be stifled.

"Well, dear," he said, "perhaps it is as you say. Nerves which are overwrought, and a system which is run down, certainly have their say, and a large say, too, in one's attitude towards any one. Now you must go to bed. I will go down and say good-night to the rector and Mr. Schuabe – just to show there's no ill-feeling; though, goodness knows, I oughtn't to jest about the man. Good-night, sweet one; God bless you. Remember me also in your prayers to-night."

She kissed him in her firm, brave way – a kiss so strong and loving, so pure and sweet, that he went away from that little room of books and *bric-à-brac* as if he had been sojourning in some shrine.

As Basil came into the study he found Mr. Byars and Schuabe in eager, animated talk. A spirit decanter had been brought in during his absence, and the vicar was taking the single glass of whisky-

and-water he allowed himself before going to bed. Basil, who was in a singularly alert and observant mood, noticed that a glass of plain seltzer water stood before the millionaire.

Gortre's personal acquaintance with Schuabe was of the slightest. He had met him once or twice on the platform of big meetings, and that was all. A simple curate, unless socially, – and Schuabe did not enter into the social life of Walktown, being almost always in London, – he would not be very likely to come in the way of this mammoth.

But Schuabe greeted him with marked cordiality, and he sat down to listen to the two men.

In two minutes he was fascinated, in five he realised, with a quick and unpleasant sense of inferiority, how ignorant he was beside these two. In Schuabe the vicar found a man whose knowledge was as wide and scholarship as profound as his own.

From a purely intellectual standpoint, probably Gortre and Schuabe were more nearly on a level, but in pure knowledge he was nowhere. He wondered, as he listened, if the generation immediately preceding his own had been blessed with more time for culture, if the foundation had been surer and more comprehensive, when they were *alumni* of the "loving mother" in the South.

They were discussing archæological questions connected with the Holy Land.

Schuabe possessed a profound and masterly knowledge of the whole Jewish background to the Gospel picture, not merely of the archæology, which in itself is a life study, but of the essential characteristics of Jewish thought and feeling, which is far more.

Of course, every now and again the conversation turned towards a direction that, pursued, would have led to controversy. But, with mutual tact, the debatable ground was avoided. That Christ was a historic fact Schuabe, of course, admitted and implied, and when the question of His Divinity seemed likely to occur he was careful and adroit to avoid any discussion.

To the young man, burning with the zeal of youth, this seemed a pity. Unconsciously, he blamed the vicar for not pressing certain points home.

What an opportunity was here! The rarity of such a visit, the obvious interest the two men were beginning to take in each other – should not a great blow for Christ be struck on such an auspicious night? Even if the protest was unavailing, the argument overthrown, was it not a duty to speak of the awful and eternal realities which lay beneath this vivid and brilliant interchange of scholarship?

His brain was on fire with passionate longing to speak. But, nevertheless, he controlled it. None knew better than he the depth and worth of the vicar's character. And he felt himself a junior; he had no right to question the decision of his superior.

"You have missed much, Mr. Byars," said Schuabe, as he arose to go at last, "in never having visited Jerusalem. One can get the knowledge of it, but never the colour. And, even to-day, the city must appear, in many respects, exactly as it did under the rule of Pilate. The Fellah women sell their vegetables, the camels come in loaded with roots for fuel, the Bedouin, the Jews with their long gowns and slippers – I wish you could see it all. I have eaten the meals of the Gospels, drunk the red wine of Saron, the spiced wine mixed with honey and black pepper, the 'wine of myrrh' mentioned in the Gospel of Mark. I have dined with Jewish tradesmen and gone through the same formalities of hand-washing as we read of two thousand years ago; I have seen the poor ostentatiously gathered in out of the streets and the best part of the meal given them for a self-righteous show. And yet, an hour afterwards, I have sat in a *café* by King David's Tower and played dice with Turkish soldiers armed with Martini rifles!"

The vicar seemed loath to let his guest go, though the hour was late, but he refused to stay longer. Mr. Byars, with a somewhat transparent eagerness, mentioned that Gortre's road home lay for part of the way in the same direction as the millionaire's. He seemed to wish the young man to accompany him, almost, so Basil thought, that the charm of his personality might rebuke him for his tirade in the early part of the evening.

Accordingly, in agreement with the vicar's evident wish, but with an inexplicable ice-cold feeling in his heart, he left the house with Schuabe and began to walk with him through the silent, lamp-lit streets.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SMOKE CLOUD AT DAWN

The two men strode along without speaking for some way. Their feet echoed in the empty streets.

Suddenly Schuabe turned to Basil. "Well, Mr. Gortre," he said, "I have given you your opportunity. Are you not going to speak the word in season after all?"

The young man started violently. Who was this man who had been reading his inner thoughts? How could his companion have fathomed his sternly repressed desire as he sat in the vicarage study? And why did he speak now, when he knew that some chilling influence had him in its grip, that his tongue was tied, his power weakened?

"It is late, Mr. Schuabe," he said at length, and very gravely. "My brain is tired and my enthusiasm chilled. Nor are you anxious to hear what I have to say. But your taunt is ungenerous. It almost seems as if you are not always so tolerant as men think!"

The other laughed – a cold laugh, but not an unkindly one. "Forgive me," he said, "one should not jest with conviction. But I should like to talk with you also. There are lusts of the brain just as there are lusts of the flesh, and to-night I am in the mood and humour for conversation."

They were approaching a side road which led to Gortre's rooms. Schuabe's great stone house was still a quarter of a mile away up the hill.

"Do not go home yet," said Schuabe, "come to my house, see my books, and let us talk. Make friends with the mammon of unrighteousness, Mr. Gortre! You are disturbed and unstrung to-night. You will not sleep. Come with me."

Gortre hesitated for a moment, and then continued with him. He was hardly conscious why he did so, but even as he accepted the invitation his nerves seemed recovered as by some powerful tonic. A strange confidence possessed him, and he strode on with the air and manner of a man who has some fixed purpose in his brain.

And as he talked casually with Schuabe, he felt towards him no longer the cold fear, the inexplicable shrinking. He regarded him rather as a vast and powerful enemy, an evil, sinister influence, indeed, but one against which he was armed with an armour not his own, with weapons forged by great and terrible hands.

So they entered the drive and walked up among the gaunt black trees towards the house.

Mount Prospect was a large, castellated modern building of stone. In a neighbourhood where architectural monstrosities abounded, perhaps it outdid them all in its almost brutal ugliness and vulgarity. It had been built by Constantine Schuabe's grandfather.

The present owner was little at Walktown. His Parliamentary and social duties bound him to London, and when he had time for recreation the newspapers announced that he had "gone abroad," and until he was actually seen again in the midst of his friends his disappearances were mysterious and complete.

In London he had a private set of rooms at one of the great hotels.

But despite his rare visits, the hideous stone palace in the smoky North held all the treasures which he himself had collected and which had been left to him by his father.

It was understood that at his death the pictures and library were to become the property of the citizens of Manchester, held in trust for them by the corporation.

Schuabe took a key from his pocket and opened the heavy door in the porch.

"I always keep the house full of servants," he said, "even when I am away, for a dismantled house and caretakers are horrible. But they will be all gone to bed now, and we must look after ourselves."

Opening an inner door, they passed through some heavy padded curtains, which fell behind them with a dull thud, and came out into the great hall.

Ugly as the shell of the great building was, the interior was very different.

Here, set like a jewel in the midst of the harsh, forbidding country, was a treasure-house of ordered beauty which had few equals in England.

Gortre drew a long, shuddering breath of pleasure as he looked round. Every æsthetic influence within him responded to what he saw. And how simple and severe it all was! Simply a great domed hall of white marble, brilliantly lit by electric light hidden high above their heads. On every side slender columns rose towards the dome, beyond them were tall archways leading to the rooms of the house; dull, formless curtains, striking no note of colour, hung from the archways.

In the centre of the vast space, exactly under the dome, was a large pool of still green water, a square basin with abrupt edges, having no fountain nor gaudy fish to break its smoothness.

And that was all, literally all. No rugs covered the tessellated floor, not a single seat stood anywhere. There was not the slightest suggestion of furniture or habitation. White, silent, and beautiful! As Gortre stood there, he knew, as if some special message had been given him, that he had come for some great hidden purpose, that it had been foreordained. His whole soul seemed filled with a holy power, unseen powers and principalities thronged round him like sweet but awful friends.

He turned inquiringly towards his host. Schuabe's face was very pale; the calm, cruel eyes seemed agitated; he was staring at the priest. "Come," he said in a voice which seemed to be without its usual confidence; "come, this place is cold – I have sometimes thought it a little too bare and fantastic – come into the library; let us eat and talk."

He turned and passed through the pillars on the right. Gortre followed him through the dark, heavy curtains which led to the library.

They found themselves in an immense low-ceilinged room. The floor was covered with a thick carpet of dull blue, and their feet made no sound as they passed over it towards the blazing fire, which glowed in an old oak framework of panelling and inglenook brought from an ancient manor-house in Norfolk.

At one end of the room was a small organ, cased, modern as the mechanism was, in priceless Renaissance painted panels from Florence and set in a little octagonal alcove hung with white and yellow.

The enormous writing-table of dark wood stood in front of the fireplace and was covered with books and papers. By it was a smaller circular table laid with a white cloth and shining glass and silver for a meal.

"My valet is in bed," said Schuabe; "I hate any one about me at night, and I prefer to wait on myself then. 'From the cool cisterns of the midnight air my spirit drinks repose.' If you will wait here a few moments I will go and get some food. I know where to find some. Pray amuse yourself by looking at my books."

He left the room noiselessly, and Basil turned towards the walls. From ceiling to floor the immense room was lined with shelves of enamelled white wood, here and there carved with tiny florid bunches of fruit and flowers – Jacobean work it seemed.

A few pictures here and there in spaces between the shelves – the hectic flummery of a Whistler nocturne; a woman *avec cerises*, by Manet; a green silk fan, painted with *fêtes gallantes*, by Conder – alone broke the many-coloured monotony of the books.

Gortre had, from his earliest Oxford days, been a lover of books and a collector in a moderate, discriminating way. As a rule he was roused to a mild enthusiasm by a fine library. But as his practised eye ran over the shelves, noting the beauty and variety of the contents, he was unmoved by any special interest. His brain, still, so it seemed, under some outside and compelling instinct or influence, was singularly detached from ordinary interests and rejected the books' appeal.

Close to where he stood the shelves were covered with theological works. Müller's *Lectures on the Vedanta Philosophy*, Romane's *Reply to Dr. Lightfoot*, De la Saussaye's *Manual*, stood together. His hand had been wandering unconsciously over the books when it was suddenly arrested, and

stopped on a familiar black binding with plain gold letters. It was an ordinary reference edition of the Holy Bible, the "pearl" edition from the Oxford University Press.

There was something familiar and homely in the little dark volume, which showed signs of constant use. A few feet away was a long shelf of Bibles of all kinds, rare editions, expensive copies bound up with famous commentaries – all the luxuries and *éditions de luxe* of Holy Writ. But the book beneath his fingers was the same size and shape as the one which stood near his own bedside in his rooms – the one which his father had given him when he went to Harrow, with "Flee youthful lusts" written on the fly-leaf in faded ink. It was homelike and familiar.

He drew it out with a half smile at himself for choosing the one book he knew by heart from this new wealth of literature.

Then a swift impulse came to him.

Gortre could not be called a superstitious man. The really religious temperament, which, while not rejecting the aids of surface and symbol, has seen far below them, rarely is "superstitious" as the word has come to be understood.

The familiar touch, the pleasant sensation of the limp, rough leather on his finger-balls gave him a feeling of security. But that very fact seemed to remind him that some danger, some subtle mental danger, was near. Was this Bible sent to him? he wondered. Were his eyes and hands *directed* to it by the vibrating, invisible presences which he felt were near him? Who could say?

But he took the book in his right hand, breathed a prayer for help and guidance – if it might so be that God, who watched him, would speak a message of help – and opened it at random.

He was about to make a trial of that old mediæval practice of "searching" – that harmless trial of faith which a modern hard-headed cleric has analysed so cleverly, so completely, and so entirely unsatisfactorily.

He opened the book, with his eyes fixed in front of him, and then let them drop towards it. For a moment the small type was all blurred and indistinct, and then one text seemed to leap out at him.

It was this —

**"TAKE YE HEED, WATCH AND PRAY:  
FOR YE KNOW NOT WHEN THE TIME IS."**

This, then, was his message! He was to *watch*, to pray, for the time was at hand when —

The curtain slid aside, and Schuabe entered with a tray. He had changed his morning coat for a long dressing-gown of camel's-hair, and wore scarlet leather slippers.

Basil slipped the Bible back into its place and turned to face him.

"I live very simply," he said, "and can offer you nothing very elaborate. But here is some cold chicken, a watercress salad, and a bottle of claret."

They sat down on opposite sides of the round table and said little. Both men were tired and hungry. After he had eaten, the clergyman bent his head for a second or two in an inaudible grace, and made the sign of the Cross before he rose from his chair.

"Symbol!" said Schuabe, with a cold smile, as he saw him.

The truce was over.

"What is that Cross to which all Christians bow?" he continued. "It was the symbol of the water-god of the Gauls, a mere piece of their iconography. The Phœnician ruin of Gigantica is built in the shape of a cross; the Druids used it in their ceremonies; it was Thor's hammer long before it became Christ's gibbet; it is used by the pagan Icelanders to this day as a magic sign in connection with storms of wind. Why, the symbol of Buddha on the reverse of a coin found at Ugain is the same cross, the 'fylfot' of Thor. The cross was carved by Brahmins a thousand years before Christ in the caves of Elephanta. I have seen it in India with my own eyes in the hands of Siva Brahma and Vishnu! The worshipper of Vishnu attributes as many virtues to it as the pious Roman Catholic here in Salford to

the Christian Cross. There is the very strongest evidence that the origin of the cross is phallic! The *crux ansata* was the sign of Venus: it appears beside Baal and Astarte!"

"Very possibly, Mr. Schuabe," said Gortre, quietly. "Your knowledge on such points is far wider than mine; but that does not affect Christianity in the slightest."

"Of course not! Who ever said it did? But this reverence for the cross, the instrument of execution on which an excellent teacher, and, as far as we know, a really good man, suffered, angers me because it reminds me of the absurd and unreasoning superstitions which cloud the minds of so many educated men like yourself."

"Ah," said Gortre, quietly, "now we are 'gripped.' We have come to the point."

"If you choose, Mr. Gortre," Schuabe answered; "you are an intellectual man, and one intellectual man has a certain right to challenge another. I was staying with Lord Haileybury the other day, and I spent two whole mornings walking over the country with the Bishop of London, talking on these subjects. He very ably endeavoured to bring physical and psychological science into a single whole. But all he seemed to me to prove was this, crystallised into an axiom or at least a postulate. *Conscious volition is the ultimate source of all force*. It is his belief that behind the sensuous and phenomenal world which gives it form, existence, and activity, lies the ultimate invisible, immeasurable power of Mind, conscious Will, of Intelligence, analogous to our own; and – mark this essential corollary — *that man is in communication with it*, and that was positively all he could do for me! I met him there easily enough, but when he tried to prove a *revelation* – Christianity – he utterly broke down. We parted very good friends, and I gave him a thousand pounds for the East London poor fund. But still, say what you will to me. I am here to listen."

He looked calmly at the young man with his unsmiling eyes. He held a Russian cigarette in his fingers, and he waved it with a gentle gesture of invitation as if from an immeasurable superiority.

And as Gortre watched him he knew that here was a brain and intelligence far keener and finer than his own. But with all that certainty he felt entirely undismayed, strangely uplifted.

"I have a message for you, Mr. Schuabe," he began, and the other bowed slightly, without irony, at his words. "I have a message for you, one which I have been sent here – I firmly believe – to deliver, but it is not the message or the argument that you expect to hear."

He stopped for a short time, marshalling his mental forces, and noticing a slight but perceptible look of surprise in his host's eyes.

"I know you better than you imagine, sir," he said gravely, "and not as many other good and devout Christians see you. I tell you here to-night with absolute certainty that you are the active enemy of Christ – I say *active* enemy."

The face opposite became slightly less tranquil, but the voice was as calm as ever.

"You speak according to your lights, Mr. Gortre," he said. "I am no Christian, but there is much good in Christianity. My words and writings may have helped to lift the veil of superstition and hereditary influences from the eyes of many men, and in that sense I am an enemy of the Christian faith, I suppose. My sincerity is my only apology – if one were needed. You speak with more harshness and less tolerance than I should have thought it your pleasure or your duty to use."

Gortre rose. "Man," he cried, with sudden sternness, "*I know! You hate our Lord*, and would work Him evil. You are as Judas was, for to-night it is given me to read far into your brain."

Schuabe rose quickly from his chair and stood facing him. His face was pallid, something looked out of his eyes which almost frightened the other.

"What do you know?" he cried as if in a swift stroke of pain. "Who – ?" He stopped as if by a tremendous effort.

Some thought came to reassure him.

"Listen," he said. "I tell you, paid priest as you are, a blind man leading the blind, that a day is coming when all your boasted fabric of Christianity will disappear. It will go suddenly, and be swept utterly away. And you, you shall see it. You shall be left naked of your faith, stripped and bare, with



all Christendom beside you. Your pale Nazarene shall die amid the bitter laughter of the world, die as surely as He died two thousand years ago, and no man or woman shall resurrect Him. You know nothing, but you will remember my words of to-night, until you also become as nothing and endure the inevitable fate of mankind."

He had spoken with extraordinary vehemence, hissing the words out with a venom and malice, general rather than particular, from which the Churchman shrunk, shuddering. There was such unutterable *conviction* in the thin, evil voice that for a moment the pain of it was like a spasm of physical agony.

Schuabe had thrown down the mask; it was even as Gortre said, the soul of Iscariot looked out from those eyes. The man saw the clergyman's sudden shrinking.

The smile of a devil flashed over his face. Gortre had turned to him once more and he saw it. And as he watched an awful certainty grew within him, a thought so appalling that beside it all that had gone before sank into utter insignificance.

He staggered for a moment and then rose to his full height, a fearful loathing in his eyes, a scorn like a whip of fire in his voice.

Schuabe blanched before him, for he saw the truth in the priest's soul.

"As the Lord of Hosts is my witness," cried Gortre loudly, "I know you now for what you are! You know that Christ is God!"

Schuabe shrank into his chair.

"Antichrist!" pealed out the accusing voice. "You know the truth full well, and, knowing, in an awful presumption you have dared to lift your hand against God."

Then there was a dead silence in the room. Schuabe sat motionless by the dying fire.

Very slowly the colour crept back into his cheeks. Slowly the strength and light entered his eyes. He moved slightly.

At last he spoke.

"Go," he said. "Go, and never let me see your face again. You have spoken. Yet I tell you still that such a blinding blow shall descend on Christendom that – "

He rose quickly from his chair. His manner changed utterly with a marvellous swiftness.

He went to the window and pulled aside the curtain. A chill and ghostly dawn came creeping into the library.

"Let us make an end of this," he said quietly and naturally. "Of what use for you and me, atoms that we are, to wrangle and thunder through the night over an infinity in which we have neither part nor lot? Come, get you homewards and rest, as I am about to do. The night has been an unpleasant dream. Treat it as such. We differ on great matters. Let that be so and we will forget it. You shall have a friend in me if you will."

Gortre, hardly conscious of any voluntary movements, his brain in a stupor, the arteries all over his body beating like little drums, took the hat and coat the other handed to him, and stumbled out of the house.

It was about five o'clock in the morning, raw, damp, and cold.

With a white face, drawn and haggard with emotion, he strode down the hill. The keen air revived his physical powers, but his brain was whirling, whirling, till connected thought was impossible.

What was it? What was the truth about that nightmare, that long, horrid night in the warm, rich room? His powers were failing; he must see a doctor after breakfast.

When he reached the foot of the hill, and was about to turn down the road which led to his rooms, he stopped to rest for a moment.

From far behind the hill, over the dark, silhouetted houses of the wealthy people who lived upon it, a huge, formless pall of purple smoke was rising, and almost blotting out the dawn in a Titanic curtain of gloom. The feeble new-born sun flickered redly through it, the colour of blood. There was

no wind that morning, and the fog and smoke from the newly lit factory chimneys in the Irwell valley could not be dispersed. It crept over the town like doom itself – menacing, vast, unconquerable.

He pulled out his latch-key with trembling hand, and turned to enter his own door.

The cloud was spreading.

"Lighten our darkness," he whispered to himself, half consciously, and then fell fainting on the door-step, where they found him soon, and carried him in to the sick-bed, where he lay sick of a brain-fever a month or more.

*Lighten our darkness!*

## CHAPTER V

### A LOST SOUL

In his great room at the British Museum, great, that is, for the private room of an official, Robert Llwellyn sat at his writing-desk finishing the last few lines of his article on the Hebrew inscription in mosaic, which had been discovered at Kefr Kenna.

It was about four in the afternoon, growing dark with the peculiarly sordid and hopeless twilight of a winter's afternoon in central London. A reading lamp upon the desk threw a bright circle of light on the sheet of white unlined paper covered with minute writing, which lay before the keeper of Biblical antiquities in the British Museum.

The view from the tall windows was hideous and almost sinister in its ugliness. Nothing met the eye but the gloomy backs of some of the great dingy lodging-houses which surround the Museum, bedroom windows, back bedrooms with dingy curtains, vulgarly unlovely.

The room itself was official looking, but far from uncomfortable. There were many bookshelves lining the walls. Over them hung large-framed photographs and drawings of inscriptions. On a stand by itself, covered with a glass shade, was a duplicate of Dr. Schick's model of the Haram Area during the Christian occupation of Jerusalem.

A dull fire glowed in the large open fireplace.

Llwellyn wrote a final line with a sigh of relief and then leaned far back in his swivel chair. His face was gloomy, and his eyes were dull with some inward communing, apparently of a disturbing and unpleasant kind.

The door opened noiselessly (all the dwellers in the mysterious private parts of the Museum walk without noise, and seem to have caught in their voices something of that almost religious reverence emanating from surroundings out of the immemorial past), and Lambert, the assistant keeper and secretary, entered.

He drew up a chair to the writing-desk.

"The firman has been granted!" he said.

A quick interest shone on Professor Llwellyn's face.

"Ah!" he said, "it has come at last, then, after all these months of waiting. I began to despair of the Turkish Government. I never thought it would be granted. Then the Society will really begin to excavate at last in the prohibited spots! Really that is splendid news, Lambert. We shall have some startling results. Results, mind you, which will be historical, historical! I doubt but that the whole theory of the Gospel narrative will have to be reconstructed during the next few years!"

"It is quite possible," said Lambert. "But, on the other hand, it may happen that nothing whatever is found."

Llwellyn nodded. Then a sudden thought seemed to strike him. "But how do you know of this, Lambert?" he said, "and how has it happened?"

Lambert was a pleasant, open-faced fellow, young, and with a certain air of distinction. He laughed gaily, and returned his chief's look of interest with an affectionate expression in his eyes.

"Ah!" he said, "I have heard a great deal, sir, and I have some thing to tell you which I am very happy about. It is gratifying to bring you the first news. Last night I was dining with my uncle, Sir Michael Manichoe, you know. The Home Secretary was there, a great friend of my uncle's. You know the great interest he takes in the work of the Exploration Society, and his general interest in the Holy Land?"

"Oh, of course," said Llwellyn. "He's the leader of the uncompromising Protestant party in the House; owes his position to it, in fact. He breakfasts with the Septuagint, lunches off the Gospels, and sups with Revelations. Well?"

"It is owing to his personal interest in the work," continued Lambert, "that the Sultan has granted the firman. After dinner he took me aside, and we had a longish talk. He was very gracious, and most eager to hear of all our recent work here, and additions to the collections in our department. I was extremely pleased, as you may imagine. He spoke of you, sir, as the greatest living authority – wouldn't hear of Conrad Schick or Clermont-Ganneau in the same breath with you. He went on to say in confidence, and he hinted to me that I had his permission to tell you, though he didn't say as much in so many words, that they are going to offer you knighthood in a few days!"

A sudden flush suffused the face of the elder man. Then he laughed a little.

"Your news is certainly unexpected, my dear boy," he said, "and, for my part, knighthood is no very welcome thing personally. But it would be idle to deny that I'm pleased. It means recognition of my work, you see. In that way only, it is good news that you have brought."

"That's just it, Professor," the young man answered enthusiastically. "That's exactly it. Sir Robert Llwellyn, or Mr. Llwellyn, of course, cannot matter to you personally. But it *is* a fitting and graceful recognition of the *work*. It is a proper thing that the greatest living authority on the antiquities and history of Asia Minor should be officially recognised. It encourages all of us, you see, Professor."

The young man's generous excitement pleased Llwellyn. He placed his hand upon his shoulder with a kindly, affectionate gesture.

At that moment a messenger knocked and entered with a bundle of letters, which had just arrived by the half-past-four post, and, with a congratulatory shake of the hand, Lambert left his chief to his correspondence.

The great specialist, when he had left the room, rose from his chair, went towards the door with swift, cat-like steps, and locked it. Then he returned to the desk, opened a deep drawer with a key which he drew from his watch-pocket, and took a silver-mounted flask of brandy from the receptacle. He poured a small dose of brandy into the metal cup and drank it hurriedly.

Then he leaned back once more in his chair.

Professor Llwellyn's face was familiar to all readers of the illustrated press. He was one of the few famous *savants* whose name was a household word not only to his colleagues and the learned generally, but also to the great mass of the general public.

In every department of effort and work there are one or two men whose personality seems to catch the popular eye.

His large, clean-shaven face might have belonged to a popular comedian; his portly figure had still nothing of old age about it. He was sprightly and youthful in manner despite his fat. The small, merry, green eyes – eyes which had yet something furtive and "alarmed" in them at times – stood for a concrete personification of good humour. His somewhat sensual lips were always smiling and jolly on public occasions. His enormous erudition and acknowledged place among the learned of Europe went so strangely with his appearance that the world was pleased and tickled by the paradox.

It was a fine thing to think that the spectacled Dry-as-dust was gone. That era of animated mummy was over, and when *The World* read of Professor Llwellyn at a first night of the Lyceum, or the guest of honour at the Savage Club, it forgot to jeer at his abstruse erudition.

Scholars admitted his scholarship, and ordinary men and women welcomed him as *homme du monde*.

The Professor replaced the flask in the drawer and locked it. His hand trembled as he did so. The light which shone on the white face showed it eloquent with dread and despair. Here, in the privacy of the huge, comfortable room, was a soul in an anguish that no mortal eyes could see.

The Professor had locked the door.

The letters which the messenger had brought were many in number and various in shape and style.

Five or six of them, which bore foreign stamps and indications that they came from the Continental antiquarian societies, he put on one side to be opened and replied to on the morrow.

Then he took up an envelope addressed to him in firm black writing and turned it over. On the flap was the white, embossed oval and crown, which showed that it came from the House of Commons. His florid face became paler than before, the flesh of it turned grey, an unpleasant sight in so large and ample a countenance, as he tore it open. The letter ran as follows:

*"House of Commons.*

"Dear Llwellyn, – I am writing to you now to say that I am quite determined that the present situation shall not continue. You must understand, finally, that my patience is exhausted, and that, unless the large sum you owe me is repaid within the next week, my solicitors have my instructions, which are quite unalterable, to proceed in bankruptcy against you without further delay.

"The principal and interest now total to the sum of fourteen thousand pounds. Your promises to repay, and your innumerable requests for more time in which to do so, now extend over a period of three years. I have preserved all your letters on the subject at issue between us, and I find that, so far from decreasing your indebtedness when your promises became due, you have almost invariably asked me for further sums, which, in foolish confidence, as I feel now, I have advanced to you.

"It would be superfluous to point out to you what bankruptcy would mean to you in your position. Ruin would be the only word. And it would be no ordinary bankruptcy. I have a by no means uncertain idea where these large sums have gone, and my knowledge can hardly fail to be shared by others in London society.

"I have still a chance to offer you, however, and, perhaps, you will find me by no means the tyrant you think.

"There are certain services which you can do me, and which, if you fall in with my views, will not only wipe off the few thousands of your indebtedness, but provide you with a capital sum which will place you above the necessity for any such financial manœuvres in the future as your – shall I say *infatuation*? – has led you to resort to in the past.

"If you care to lunch with me at my rooms in the Hotel Cecil, at two o'clock, the day after to-morrow – Friday – we may discuss your affairs quietly. If not, then I must refer you to my solicitors entirely.

"Yours sincerely,  
*"Constantine Schuabe."*

The big man gave a horrid groan – half snarl, half groan – the sound which comes from a strong animal desperate and at bay.

He crossed over to the fireplace and pushed the letter down into a glowing cavern among the coals, holding it there with the poker until it was utterly consumed and fluttered up the chimney from his sight in a sheet of ash – the very colour of his relaxed and pendulous cheeks.

He opened another letter, a small, fragile thing written on mauve paper, in a large, irregular hand – a woman's hand: —

*"15 Bloomsbury Court Mansions.*

"Dear Bob – I shall expect you at the flat to-night at eleven, *without fail*. You'd better come, or things which you won't like will happen.

"You've just *got* to come.  
*Gertrude."*

He put this letter into his pocket and began to walk the room in long, silent strides.

A little after five he put on a heavy fur coat and left the now silent and gloomy halls of the Museum.

The lamps of Holborn were lit and a blaze of light came from Oxford Circus, where the winking electric advertisements had just begun their work on the tops of the houses.

A policeman saluted the Professor as he passed, and was rewarded by a genial smile and jolly word of greeting, which sent a glow of pleasure through his six feet.

Llwellyn walked steadily on towards the Marble Arch and Edgware Road. The continual roar of the traffic helped his brain. It became active and able to think, to plan once more. The steady exercise warmed his blood and exhilarated him.

There began to be almost a horrid pleasure in the stress of his position. The danger was so immediate and fell; the blow would be so utterly irreparable, that he was near to enjoying his walk while he could still consider the thing from a detached point of view.

Throughout life that had always been his power. A strange resilience had animated him in all chances and changes of fortune.

He was that almost inhuman phenomenon, a sensualist with a soul.

For many years, while his name became great in Europe and the solid brilliancy of his work grew in lustre as he in age, he had lived two lives, finding an engrossing joy in each.

The lofty scientific world of which he was an ornament had no points of contact with that other and unspeakable half-life. Rumours had been bruited, things said in secret by envious and less distinguished men, but they had never harmed him. His colleagues hardly understood them and cared nothing. His work was all-sufficient; what did it matter if smaller people with forked tongues hissed horrors of his private life?

The other circles – the lost slaves of pleasure – knew him well and were content. He came into the night-world a welcome guest. They knew nothing of his work or fame beyond dim hintings of things too uninteresting for them to bother about.

He turned down the Edgware Road and then into quiet Upper Berkeley Street, a big, florid, prosperous-looking man, looking as though the world used him well and he was content with all it had to offer.

His house was but a few doors down the street and he went up-stairs to dress at once. He intended to dine at home that night.

His dressing-room, out of which a small bedroom opened, was large and luxurious. A clear fire glowed upon the hearth; the carpet was soft and thick. The great dressing-table with its three-sided mirror was covered with brushes and ivory jars, gleaming brightly in the rays of the little electric lights which framed the mirror. A huge wardrobe, full of clothes neatly folded and put away, suggested a man about town, a dandy with many sartorial interests. An arm-chair of soft green leather, stamped with red-gold pomegranates, stood by a small black table stencilled with orange-coloured bees. On the table stood a cigarette-box of finely plaited cream-coloured straw, woven over silver and cedar-wood, and with Llwellyn's initials in turquoise on one lid.

He threw off his coat and sank into the chair with a sigh of pleasure at the embracing comfort of it. Then his fingers plunged into the tea which filled the box on the table and drew out a tiny yellow cigarette.

He smoked in luxurious silence.

He had already half forgotten the menacing letter from Constantine Schuabe, the imperative summons to the flat in Bloomsbury Court Mansions. This was a moment of intense physical ease. The flavour of his saffron Salonika cigarette, a tiny glass of garnet-coloured *cassis* which he had poured out, were alike excellent. All day long he had been at work on a brilliant monograph dealing with the new Hebrew mosaics. Only two other living men could have written it. But his work also had fallen out of his brain. At that moment he was no more than a great animal, soulless, with the lusts of the flesh pouring round him, whispering evil and stinging his blood.

A timid knock fell upon the door outside. It opened and Mrs. Llwellyn came slowly in.

The Professor's wife was a tall, thin woman. Her untidy clothes hung round her body in unlovely folds. Her complexion was muddy and unwholesome; but the unsmiling, withered lips revealed a row of fair, white, even teeth. It was in her eyes that one read the secret of this lady. They were large and blue, once beautiful, so one might have fancied. Now the light had faded from them and they were blurred and full of pain.

She came slowly up to her husband's chair, placing one hand timidly upon it.

"Oh, is that you?" he said, not brutally, but with a complete and utter indifference. "I shall want some dinner at home to-night. I shall be going out about ten to a supper engagement. See about it now, something light. And tell one of the maids to bring up some hot water."

"Yes, Robert," she said, and went out with no further word, but sighing a little as she closed the door quietly.

They had been married fifteen years. For fourteen of them he had hardly ever spoken to her except in anger at some household accident. On her own private income of six hundred a year she had to do what she could to keep the house going. Llwellyn never gave her anything of the thousand a year which was his salary at the Museum, and the greater sums he earned by his work outside it. She knew no one, the Professor went into none but official society, and indeed but few of his colleagues knew that he was a married man. He treated the house as a hotel, sleeping there occasionally, breakfasting, and dressing. His private rooms were the only habitable parts of the house. All the rest was old, faded, and without comfort. Mrs. Llwellyn spent most of her life with the two servants in the kitchen.

She always swept and tidied her husband's rooms herself. That afternoon she had built and coaxed the fire with her own hands.

She slept in a small room at the top of the house, next to the maids, for company.

This was her life.

Over the head of the little iron bedstead of her room hung a great crucifix.

That was her hope.

When Llwellyn was rioting in nameless places she prayed for him during the night. She prayed for him, for herself, and for the two servant girls, very simply – that Heaven might receive them all some day.

The maid brought up some dinner for the Professor – a little soup, a sole, and some *camembert*.

He ate slowly, and smoked a short light-brown cigar with his coffee. Then he bathed, put on evening clothes, dressing himself with care and circumspection, and left the house.

In the Edgeware Road he got into a hansom and told the man to drive him to Bloomsbury Court Mansions.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE WHISPER

Robert Llwellyn paid the cabman outside the main gateway which led into the courtyard, and dismissed him.

The Court Mansions were but a few hundred yards from the British Museum itself, though he never visited them in the day time. A huge building, like a great hotel, rose skyward in a square. In the quadrangle in the centre, which was paved with asphalt, was an ornamental fountain surrounded by evergreen plants in tubs.

The Professor strode under the archway, his feet echoing in the stillness, and passed over the open space, which was brilliantly lit with the hectic radiance of arc lamps. He entered one of the doorways, and turning to the right of the ground-floor, away from the lift which was in waiting to convey passengers to the higher storeys, he stopped at No. 15.

He took a latch-key from his pocket, opened the door, and entered. It was very warm and close inside, and very silent also. The narrow hall was lit by a crimson-globed electric lamp. It was heavily carpeted, and thick curtains of plum-coloured plush, edged with round, fluffy balls of the same colour, hung over the doors leading into it.

He hung his hat up on a peg, and stood perfectly silent for a moment in the warm, scented air. He could hear no sound but the ticking of a French clock. The flat was obviously empty; and pulling aside one of the curtains, he went into the dining-room.

The place was full of light. Gertrude Hunt, or her maid, had, with characteristic carelessness, forgotten to turn off the switches. Llwellyn sat down and looked around him. How familiar the place was! The casual visitor would have recognised at a glance that the occupant of the room belonged to the dramatic profession.

Photographs abounded everywhere. The satinwood overmantel was crowded with them in heavy frames of chased silver. Bold enlargements hung on the crimson walls; they were upright, and stacked in disorderly heaps upon the grand piano.

All were of one woman – a dark Jewish girl with eyes full of a fixed fascination, a trained regard of allurements.

The eyes pursued him everywhere; bold and inviting, he was conscious of their multitude, and moved uneasily.

The dining-table was in a curious litter. Half-empty cups of egg-shell china stood upon a tray of Japanese lacquer inlaid with ivory and silver; a cake basket held pink and honey-coloured bonbons, among which some cigarette ends had fallen. Two empty bottles, which had held champagne, stood side by side, cheek by jowl, with a gilt tray, on which was a miniature methyl lamp and some steel curling tongs.

The arm-chairs were upholstered in pink satin. On one of them was a long fawn-coloured tailor-made coat, hanging collar downwards over the back. A handful of silver and a tiny gun-metal cigarette case had dropped out of a pocket on to the seat of the chair.

The whole place reeked with a well-known perfume – an evil, sickly smell of ripe lilies and the acrid smoke of Egyptian tobacco. A frilled dressing jacket covered with yellowish lace lay in a tumbled heap upon the hearth-rug.

The room would have struck an ordinary visitor with a sense of nausea almost like a physical blow. There was something sordidly shameless about it. The vulgarest and most material of Circes held sway among all this gaudy and lavish disorder. The most sober-living and innocent-minded man, brought suddenly into such a place, would have known it instantly for what it was, and turned to fly as from a pestilence.



A week or two before, a picture of this den had appeared in one of the illustrated papers. Underneath the photograph had been printed —

## **"THE BOUDOIR OF ONE OF LONDON'S POPULAR FAVOURITES**

### **MISS GERTRUDE HUNT AT HOME."**

Below had been another picture — "Miss Hunt in her new motor-car." Robert Llwellyn had paid four hundred pounds for the machine.

The big man seemed to fit into these surroundings as a hand into a glove. In his room at the Museum, on a platform at the Royal Society, his intellect always animated his face. In such places his personality was eminent, as his work also.

Here he was changed. Silenus was twin to him; he sniffed the perfume with pleasure; he stretched himself to the heat and warmth like a great cat. He was an integral part of the *mise-en-scène*— lost, and arrogant of his degradation.

A key clicked in the lock, there was a rustling of silk, and Gertrude Hunt swept into the room.

"So you're come to time, then," she said in a deep, musical voice, but spoilt by an unpleasing Cockney twang. "I'm dead tired. The theatre was crammed; I had to sing the *Coon of Coons* twice. Get me a brandy-and-soda, Bob. There's a good boy — the decanter's in the sideboard."

She threw off her long cloak and sank into a chair. The sticky grease-paint of the theatre had hardly been removed. She looked, as she said, worn out.

They chatted for a few moments on indifferent subjects, and she lit a cigarette. When she took it from her lips, Llwellyn noticed that the end was crimsoned by the paint upon them.

"Well," she said at length, "somehow or other you must pay those bills I sent on to you. They *must* be paid. I can't do it. I'm only getting twenty-five pounds from the theatre now, and that's just about enough to pay my drink bill!"

Llwellyn's face clouded. "I'm just about at my last gasp myself," he said. "I'm threatened with bankruptcy as it is."

"Oh, cheer up!" she cried. "Here, have a B. and S. I do hate to hear any one talk like that. It gives me the hump at once. Now look here, Bob. You know that I like you better than any one else. We've been pals for seven or eight years now, and I'd rather have you a thousand times than the others. You understand that, don't you?"

He nodded back at her. His face was pleased at her expression of affection, at the kindness of this dancing-girl to the great scholar!

"But," she continued, "you know me, and you know that I can't go on unless I have what I want all the time. And I want a lot, too. If you can't give it me, Bob, it must be some one else — that's all. Captain Parker's ready to do anything, any time. He's almost a millionaire, you know. Can't you raise any 'oof anyhow? If I'd a thousand at once, and another in a week or two, I could manage for a bit. But I *must* have a river-house at Shepperton. That cat, Lulu Wallace, has one, and an electric launch and all. What about your German friend — the M.P.? *He's* got tons of stuff. Touch him for a bit more."

"Had a letter from him this afternoon," said Llwellyn, "with a demand for about fourteen thousand that I owe him now. Threatens to sell me up. But there was something which looked brighter at the end of the letter, though I couldn't quite make out what he was driving at."

"What was that?"

"The tone of the letter changed; it had been nasty before. He said that I could do him a service for which he would not only wipe out the old debt, but for which I could get a lot more money."

"You'll go to him at once, Bob, won't you?"

"I suppose I must. There's no way out of it. I can't think, though, how I can do him any service. He's a dabbler, an amateur in my own work, but he's not going to pay a good many thousands for any help in *that*."

"Let it alone till you find out," she said, with the instinctive dislike of her class to the prolonged discussion of anything unpleasant. She got up and rang the bell for her maid and supper.

For some reason Llwellyn could eat nothing. A weight oppressed him – a presage of danger and disaster. The unspeakable mental torments that the vicious man who is highly educated undergoes – torments which assail him in the very act and article of his pleasures – have never been adequately described. "What a frail structure his honours and positions were," he thought as the woman chatted of the *coulisses* and the blackguard news of the *demi-monde*. His indulgent life had acted on the Professor with a dire physical effect. His nerves were unstrung and he became childishly superstitious. The slightest hint of misfortune set his brain throbbing with a horrid fear. The spectre of overwhelming disaster was always waiting, and he could not exorcise it.

The two accidental and trivial facts that the knives at his place were crossed, and that he spilt the salt as he was passing it to his mistress, set him crossing himself with nervous rapidity.

The girl laughed at him, but she was interested nevertheless. For the moment they were on an intellectual level. He explained that the sign of the Cross was said to avert misfortune, and she imitated him clumsily.

Llwellyn thought nothing of it at the time, but the meaningless travesty came back afterwards when he thought over that eventful night.

Surely the holy sign of God's pain was never so degraded as now.

Their conversation grew fitful and strained. The woman was physically tired by her work at the theatre, and the dark cloud of menace crept more rapidly into the man's brain. The hour grew late. At last Llwellyn rose to go.

"You'll get the cash somehow, dear, won't you?" she said with tired eagerness.

"Yes, yes, Gertie," he replied. "I suppose I can get it somehow. I'll get home now. If it's a clear night I shall walk home. I'm depressed – it's liver, I suppose – and I need exercise."

"Have a drink before you go?"

"No, I've had two, and I can't take spirits at this time."

He went out with a perfunctory and uninterested kiss. She came to the archway with him.

London was now quite silent in its most mysterious and curious hour. The streets were deserted, but brilliantly lit by the long row of lamps.

They stood talking for a moment or two in the quadrangle.

"Queer!" she said; "queer, isn't it, just now? I walked back from the Covent Garden ball once at this time. Makes you feel lonesome. Well, so long, Bob. I shall have a hot bath and go to bed."

The Professor's feet echoed loudly on the flags as he approached the open space. Never had he seemed to hear the noises of his own progress so clearly before. It was disconcerting, and emphasised the fact of his sole movement in this lighted city of the dead.

On the island in the centre of the cross-roads he suddenly caught sight of a tall policeman standing motionless under a lamp. The fellow seemed a figure of metal hypnotised by the silence.

Llwellyn walked onwards, when, just as he was passing the Oxford Music Hall, he became conscious of quick footsteps behind him. He turned quickly, and a man came up. He was of middle size, with polite, watchful eyes and clean shaven.

The stranger put his hand into the pocket of his neat, unobtrusive black overcoat and drew out a letter.

"For you, sir," he said in calm, ordinary tones.

The Professor stared at him in uncontrollable surprise and took the envelope, opening it under a lamp. This was the note. He recognised the handwriting at once.

*"Hotel Cecil.*

"Dear Llwellyn, – Kindly excuse the suddenness of my request and come down to the Cecil with my valet. I have sent him to meet you. I want to settle our business to-night, and I am certain that we shall be able to make some satisfactory arrangement. I know you do not go to bed early. – Most sincerely yours,

*"Constantine Schuabe."*

"This is a very sudden request," he said to the servant rather doubtfully, but somewhat reassured by the friendly signature of the note. "Why, it's two o'clock in the morning!"

"Extremely sorry to trouble you, sir," replied the valet civilly, "but my master's strict orders were that I should find you and deliver the note. He told me that you would probably be visiting at Bloomsbury Court Mansions, so I waited about, hoping to meet you. I brought the *coupé*, sir, in case we should not be able to get you a cab."

Following the direction of his glance, Llwellyn saw that a small rubber-tired brougham to seat two people was coming slowly down the road. The coachman touched his hat as the Professor got in, and, turning down Charing Cross Road, in a few minutes they drove rapidly into the courtyard of the hotel.

Schuabe had not been established at the Cecil for any length of time. Though he owned a house in Curzon Street, this was let for a long period to Miss Mosenthal, his aunt, and he had hitherto lived in chambers at the Albany.

But he found the life at the hotel more convenient and suited to his temperament. His suite of rooms was one of the most costly even in that great river palace of to-day, but such considerations need never enter into his life.

The utter unquestioned freedom of such a life, its entire liberation from any restraint or convention, suited him exactly.

Llwellyn had never visited Schuabe in his private apartments before at any time. As he was driven easily to the meeting he nerved himself for it, summoning up all his resolution. He swept aside the enervating influences of the last few hours.

Schuabe was waiting in the large sitting-room with balconies upon which he could look down upon the embankment and the river. It was his favourite among all the rooms of the suite.

He looked gravely and also a little curiously at the Professor as he entered the room. There was a question in his eyes; the guest had a sensation of being measured and weighed with some definite purpose.

The greeting was cordial enough. "I am very sorry, Llwellyn, to catch you suddenly like this," Schuabe said, "but I should like to settle the business between us without delay. I have certain proposals to make you, and if we agree upon them there will be much to consider, as the thing is a big one. But before we talk of this let me offer you something to eat."

The Professor had recovered his hunger. The chill of the night air, the sudden excitement of the summons, and, though he did not realise it, the absence of patchouli odours in his nostrils, had recalled an appetite.

The space and air of the huge room, with its high roof, was soothing after Bloomsbury Court Mansions.

Supper was spread for two on a little round table by the windows. Schuabe ate little, but watched the other with keen, detective eyes, talking meanwhile of ordinary, trivial things. Nothing escaped him, the little gleam of pleasure in Llwellyn's eyes at the freshness of the caviare, the Spanish olives he took with his partridge – rejecting the smaller French variety – the impassive watchful eyes saw it all.

It was too late for coffee, Llwellyn said, when the man brought it, in a long-handled brass pan from Constantinople, but he took a *kimmel* instead.

The two men faced each other on each side of the table. Both were smoking. For a moment there was silence; the critical time was at hand. Then Schuabe spoke. His voice was cold and steady and very businesslike. As he talked the voice seemed to wrap round Llwelllyn like steel bands. There was something relentless and inevitable about it; bars seemed rising as he spoke.

"I am going to be quite frank with you, Llwelllyn," he said, "and you will find it better to be quite frank with me."

He took a paper from the pocket of his smoking jacket and referred to it occasionally.

"You owe me now about fourteen thousand pounds?"

"Yes, it is roughly that."

"Please correct me if I am wrong in any point. Your salary at the British Museum is a thousand pounds a year, and you make about fifteen hundred more."

"Yes, about that, but how do you – "

"I have made it my business to know everything, Professor. For example, they are about to offer you knighthood."

Llwelllyn stirred uneasily, and the hand which stretched out for another cigarette shook a little.

"I need hardly point out to you," the cold words went on, and a certain sternness began to enforce them, "I need hardly point out that if I were to take certain steps, your position would be utterly ruined."

"Bankruptcy need not entirely ruin a man."

"It would ruin you. You see *I know where the money has gone*. Your private tastes are nothing to me, and it is not my business if you choose to spend a fortune on a cocotte. But in your position, as the very mainspring and arm of the Higher Criticism of the Bible, the revelations which would most certainly be made would ruin you irreparably. Your official posts would all go at once, your name would become a public scandal everywhere. In England one may do just what one likes if only one does not in any way, by reason of position or attainments, belong to the nation. You *do* belong to the nation. You can never defy public opinion. With the ethical point of view I have nothing personally to do. But to speak plainly, in the eyes of the great mass of English people you would be stamped as an irredeemably vicious man, if everything came out. That is what they would call you. At one blow everything – knighthood, honour, place – all would flash away. Moreover, you would have to give up the other side of your life. There would be no more suppers with Phryne or rides to Richmond in the new motor-car."

He laughed, a low, contemptuous laugh which stung. Llwelllyn's face had grown pale. His large, white fingers picked uneasily at the table-cloth.

His position was very clearly shown to him, with greater horror and vividness than ever it had come to him before, even in his moments of acutest depression.

The overthrow would be indeed utter and complete. With the greedy imagination of the sensualist he saw himself living in some cheap foreign town, Bruges perhaps, or Brussels, upon his wife's small income, bereft alike of work and pleasure.

"All you say is true," he murmured as the other made an end. "I am in your power. It is best to be plain about these things. What is your alternative?"

"My alternative, if you accept it, will mean certain changes to you. First of all, it will be necessary for you to obtain a year's leave from the British Museum. I had thought of asking you to resign your position, but that will not be necessary, I think, now. This can be arranged with a specialist easily enough. Even if your health does not really warrant it, a word from me to Sir James Fyfe will manage that. You will have to travel. In return for your services and your absolute secrecy – though when you hear my proposals you will realise that perhaps in the whole history of the world never was secrecy so important to any man's safety – I will do as follows. I will wipe off your debt at once. I will pay you ten thousand pounds in cash this week, and during the year, as may be agreed

upon between us, I will make over forty thousand pounds more to you. In all fifty thousand pounds, exclusive of your debt."

His voice had not been raised, nor did it show any excitement during this tremendous proposal. The effect on Llwellyn was very different. He rose from his chair, trembling with excitement, staring with bloodshot eyes at the beautiful chiselled face below.

"You – you *mean* it?" he said huskily.

The millionaire made a single confirmatory gesture.

Then the whole magnitude and splendour of the offer became gradually plain to him in all its significance.

"I suppose," he said, "that, as the payment is great, the risk is commensurate."

"There will be none if you do what I shall ask properly. Only two other men living would do it, and, first and foremost, you will have to guard against *their* vigilance."

"Then, in God's name, what do you ask?" Llwellyn almost shouted. The tension was almost unbearable.

Schuabe rose from his seat. For the first time the Professor saw that he was terribly agitated. His eyes glowed, the apple in his throat worked convulsively.

"*You are to change the history of the world!*"

He drew Llwellyn into the very centre of the room, and held him firmly by the elbows. Tall as the Professor was, Schuabe was taller, and he bent and whispered into the other's ear for a full five minutes.

There was no sound in the room but the low hissing of his sibilants.

Llwellyn's face became white, and then ashen grey. His whole body seemed to shrink from his clothes; he trembled terribly.

Then he broke away from his host and ran to the fireplace with an odd, jerky movement, and sank cowering into an arm-chair, filled with an unutterable dread.

As morning stole into the room the Professor took a bundle of bills and acknowledgements from Schuabe and thrust them into the fire with a great sob of relief.

Then he turned into a bedroom and sank into the deep slumber of absolute exhaustion.

He did not go to the Museum that day.

## CHAPTER VII

### LAST WORDS AT WALKTOWN

The great building of the Walktown national schools blazed with light. Every window was a patch of vivid orange in the darkness of the walls. The whole place was pervaded by a loud, whirring hum of talk and laughter and an incredible rattle of plates and saucers.

In one of the classrooms down-stairs Helena Byars, with a dozen other ladies of the parish, presided over a scene of intense activity. Huge urns of tea ready mixed with the milk and sugar, were being carried up the stone stairs to the big schoolroom by willing hands. Piles of thick sandwiches of ham, breakfast-cups of mustard, hundreds of slices of moist wedge-shaped cake covered the tables, lessening rapidly as they were carried away to the crowded rooms above.

A Lancashire church tea-party was in full swing, for this was the occasion when Basil Gortre was to say an official farewell to the people among whom he had worked in the North.

In the tea-room itself several hundred people were making an enormous meal at long tables, under flaring, naked gas-lights, which sent shimmering vapours of heat up to the pitch-pine beams of the room above.

On the walls of the schoolroom hung long, map-like pictures, heavily glazed. Some of them were representations of foreign animals, or trees and plants, with the names printed below each in thick black type. Others represented scenes from the life of Christ, and though somewhat stiff and wooden, showed clearly the immense strides that educational art has taken during the past few years.

At one end of the room was a platform running along its length. Some palms and tree-ferns in pots, chairs, a grand piano, and some music stands, promised a concert when tea should be over.

All the ladies of the parish were acting as attendants, or presiding at the urns on each table. There could be no doubt that the people were in a state of high good humour and enjoyment. Every now and again a great roar of laughter would break through the prevailing hum from one table or another. Despite the almost stifling heat and a mixed odour of humanity and ham, which a sensitive person might have shrunk from, the rough, merry Lancashire folk were happy as may be.

Basil Gortre, in his long, black coat, his skin somewhat pale from his long illness, walked from table to table, spending a few minutes at each. His face was wreathed in perpetual smiles, and roars of laughter followed each sally of his wit, a homely cut-and-thrust style of humour adapted to his audience. The fat mothers of families, wives of prosperous colliers and artisans, with their thick gold earrings and magenta frocks, beamed motherhood and kindness at him. The Sunday-school teachers giggled and blushed with pleasure when he spoke.

The vicar, smiling paternally as was his wont, walked up and down the gangways also, toying with the *pince-nez* at his breast, and very successfully concealing the fact from every one that he was by no means in the seventh heaven of happiness. Tea-parties, so numerous and popular in the North, were always somewhat of a trial to him.

Basil and Mr. Byars met in the middle of the room when the tea was nearly over. Tears were gleaming in the eyes of the younger man.

"It is hard to leave them all," he said. "How good and kind they are, how hearty! And these are the people I thought disliked me and misunderstood me. I resented what I thought was a vulgar familiarity and a coarse dislike. But how different they are beneath the surface!"

"They have warm, loyal hearts, Basil," said the vicar. "It is a pity that such uncouth manners and exteriors should go with them. Surface graces may not mean much, but there is no doubt they have a tremendous influence over the human mind. During your illness the whole parish thought of little else, I really believe. And to-night you will have very practical evidence of their friendship. You know, of course, that there is going to be a presentation?"

"Yes. I couldn't help knowing that much, though I wish they wouldn't."

"It is very good of them. Now I shall call for grace."

The vicar made his way on to the platform and loudly clapped his hands. The tumult died suddenly away into silence, punctuated here and there by a belated rattle of a teacup and the spasmodic choking of some one endeavouring to bolt a large piece of cake in a hurry.

"We will now sing grace," Mr. Byars said in a clear and audible voice, – "the *Old Hundred*, following our usual custom."

As he spoke a little, bearded man in a frock-coat clambered up beside him. This was Mr. Cuthbert, the organist of the parish church. The little man pulled a tuning-fork from his pocket and struck it on the back of a chair.

Then he held it to his ear for a moment. The people had all risen, and the room was now quite silent.

"La!" sang the little organist, giving the note in a long, melodious call.

He raised his hand, gave a couple of beats in the air, and the famous old hymn burst out royally. The great volume of sound seemed too fierce and urgent even for that spacious room. It pressed against the ear-drums almost with pain, though sung with the perfect time and tune which are the heritage of the sweet-voiced North-country folk: —

"All people that on earth do dwell,  
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice!"

How hearty it was! How strong and confident!

As Basil Gortre listened his heart expanded in love and fellowship towards these brother Christians. The dark phantoms which had rioted in his sick brain during the long weeks of his illness lay dead and harmless now. The monstrous visions of a conventional and formal Christianity, covering a world of secret and gibing atheism, seemed incredibly far removed from the glorious truth, as these strong, homely people sang a full-voiced *ave* to the great brooding Trinity of Power and Love unseen, but all around them.

Who was he to be refined and too dainty for his uses? There seemed nothing incongruous in the picture before his eyes. The litter of broken ham, the sloppy cups, the black-coated men with brilliant sky-blue satin ties, the women with thick gnarled hands and clothes the colour of a copper kettle, what were they now but his very own brethren, united in this burst of praise?

And he joined in the doxology with all his heart and voice, his clear tenor soaring joyously above the rest:

"To FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST,  
The GOD Whom Heaven and earth adore,  
From men and from the Angel-host  
Be praise and glory evermore. Amen."

It ceased with suddenness. There was the satisfied silence of a second, and then the attendant helpers, assisted by the feasters, fell swiftly upon the tables. Cloths and crockery vanished like snow melting in sunlight, and as each table was laid bare it was turned up by a patent arrangement, and became a long bench with a back, which was added to the rows of seats facing the platform. As each iron-supported seat was pushed noisily into its place it was filled up at once with a laughing crowd, replete but active, smacking anticipatory chops over the entertainment and speech-making to come.

Mr. Cuthbert, a painstaking pianist, whose repertoire was noisily commonplace, opened the concert with a solo.

Songs and recitations followed. All were well received by an audience which was determined to enjoy itself, but it was obvious that the real event of the gathering was eagerly awaited.

At last the eventful moment arrived. A table covered with green baize and bearing some objects concealed by a cloth was carried on the platform, and a row of chairs placed on either side of it.

The vicar, Basil, a strange clergyman, and a little group of black-coated churchwardens and sidesmen filed upon the platform amid tumultuous cheering and clapping of hands.

Mr. Pryde, the solicitor, rose first, and pronounced a somewhat pompous but sincere eulogy upon Basil's work and life at Walktown, which was heard in an absolute and appreciative silence, only broken by the scratching pencil of the reporter from a local paper.

Then he called upon the vicar to make the presentation.

Basil advanced to the table.

"My dear friends and fellow-workers," said Mr. Byars, "I am not going to add much to what Mr. Pryde has said. As most of you know, Mr. Gortre stands and is about to stand to me in even a nearer and more intimate relation than that of assistant priest to his parish priest. But before giving Mr. Gortre the beautiful presents which your unbounded generosity has provided, and in order that you may have as little speech-making from me as possible, I want to take this opportunity of introducing the Reverend Henry Nuttall to you to-night."

He bowed towards the stranger clergyman, a pleasant, burly, clean-shaven man.

"I am going from among you for a couple of months, as I believe you have been told, and Mr. Nuttall is to take my place as your temporary pastor for that time. My doctor has ordered me rest for a time. So my daughter and myself, together with Mr. Gortre, who sadly needs change after his illness, and who is not to take up his duties in London for several weeks, are going away together for a holiday. And now I will simply ask Mr. Gortre to accept this tea-service and watch in the name of the congregation of St. Thomas as a token of their esteem and good-will."

He pulled the cloth away and displayed some glittering silver vessels. Then he handed the agitated young man a gold watch in a leather case.

Basil faced the shouting, enthusiastic crowd, staring through dimmed eyes at the long rows of animated faces.

When there was a little silence he began to speak in a voice of great emotion.

Very simply and earnestly he thanked them for their good-will and kindness.

"This may be," he said, "the last time I shall ever have the privilege and pleasure of speaking to you. I want to give you one last message. I want to urge one and all here to-night to do one thing. Keep your faith unspotted, unstained by doubts, uninfluenced by fears. Do that and all will be well with you here and hereafter." His voice sank a full tone and he spoke with marked emphasis. "I have sometimes thought and felt of late that possibly the time may be at hand, we who are here to-night may witness a time, when the Powers and Principalities of evil will make a great and determined onslaught upon the Christian Faith. I may not read the signs of the times aright, my premonitions – for they have sometimes amounted even to that – may be unfounded or imaginary. But if such a time shall come, if the 'horror of great darkness,' a spiritual horror, that we read of in Genesis, descend upon the world and envelop it in its gloom and terror, oh! let us have faith. Keep the light burning steadily. 'Let nothing disturb thee; let nothing affright thee. All passeth: God only remaineth.' And now, dear brothers and sisters in the Holy Faith, thank you, God bless you, and farewell."

There was a tense silence as his voice dropped to a close.

Here and there a woman sobbed.

There was something peculiar about his warning. He spoke almost in prophecy, as if he *knew* of some terror coming, and saw its advance from afar. His face, pale and thin from fever, his bright, earnest eyes, not the glittering eyes of a fanatic, but the saner, wiser ones of the earnest single-minded man, had an immense influence with them there.

And that night, as they trudged home to mean dwellings, or suburban villas, or rolled away in carriages, each person heard the intense, quiet voice warning them of the future, exhorting them to be steadfast in the Faith.



Seed which bore most fragrant blossom in the time which, though they knew it not, was close at hand was sown that night.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A DINNER AT THE PANNIER D'OR

Helena stood with her hand raised to her eyes, close by the port paddle-box, staring straight in front of her at a faint grey line upon the horizon.

A stiff breeze was blowing in the Channel, though the sun was shining brightly on the tossing waters, all yellow-green with pearl lights, like a picture by Henry Moore.

By the tall, graceful figure of the girl, swaying with the motion of the steamer and bending gracefully to the sudden onslaughts of the wind, stood a thick-set man of middle height, dressed in a tweed suit. His face was a strong one. Heavy reddish eyebrows hung over a pair of clear grey eyes, intellectual and kindly. The nose was beak-like and the large, rugged, red moustache hid the mouth.

This was Harold Spence, the journalist with whom Gortre was to live after the holiday was over and he began his work in Bloomsbury. Spence was snatching a few days from his work in Fleet Street, in order to accompany Gortre and Mr. and Miss Byars to Dieppe. It had been his first introduction to the vicar and his daughter.

"So that is really France, Mr. Spence!" said Helena; "the very first view of a foreign country I've ever had. I don't suppose you've an idea of what I'm feeling now? It seems so wonderful, something I've been waiting for all my life."

Spence smiled kindly, irradiating his face with good humour as he did so.

"Well, *my* sensations or emotions at present, Miss Byars, are entirely confined to wondering whether I am going to be seasick or not."

"Don't speak of it!" said a thin voice, a voice from which all the blood seemed to be drained, and, turning, they saw the vicar at their elbow.

His face was livid, his beard hung in lank dejection, a sincere misery poured from his pathetic eyes.

"Basil," he said, "Basil is down in the saloon eating greasy cold chicken and ham and drinking pale ale! I told him it was an outrage – " His feelings overcame him and he staggered away towards the stern.

"Poor father," said the girl. "He never could stand the sea, you know. But he very soon gets all right when he is on dry land again. Oh, look! that must be a church tower! I can see it quite distinctly, and the sun on the roofs of the houses!"

"That is St. Jacques," said Spence, "and that dome some way to the right, is St. Remy. Farthest of all to the right, on the cliffs, you can just see the *château* where the garrison is."

Helena gazed eagerly and became silent in her excitement. Basil, who came up from the saloon and joined them, the healthy colour beginning to glow out on his cheeks once more, watched her tenderly. There was something childishly sweet in her delight as the broad, tub-like boat kicked its way rapidly towards the quaint old foreign town.

In smoky Walktown he had not often seen her thus. Life was a more sober thing there, and her nature was graver than that of many girls, attuned to her environment. But, at the beginning of this holiday time, under a brilliant spring sun, which she was already beginning to imagine had a foreign charm about it, she too was happy and in a holiday mood.

Basil pulled out his new and glorious gold watch, which had replaced the battered old gun-metal one he usually wore. Though not a poor man, he was simple in all his tastes, and the new toy gave him a recurring and childish pleasure whenever he looked at it.

"We ought to be in in about twenty minutes," he said. "Have you noticed that the tossing of the ship has almost stopped? The land protects us. How clear the town is growing! I wonder if you will remember any of your French, Helena? I almost wish I was like you, seeing a foreign country for the first time. Spence is the real *voyageur* though. He's been all over the world for his paper."

The vicar came up to them again, just as there was a general movement of the passengers towards the deck. A hooting cry from the steam whistle wailed over the water and the boat began to move slowly.

In a few more minutes they had passed the breakwater and were gliding slowly past the wharves towards the landing-stage.

Suddenly Helena clutched hold of Basil's arm.

"O Basil," she whispered, "how beautiful – look! Guarding the harbour!"

He turned and followed the direction of her glance.

An enormous crucifix, more than life size, planted in the ground, rose from the low cliffs on the right for all entering the harbour to see.

They watched the symbol in silence as the passengers chattered on every side and gathered up their rugs and hand-bags.

Gortre slipped his arm through Helena's.

The reminder was so vivid and sudden it affected them powerfully. They were both people of the world, living in it and enjoying the pleasures of life that came in their way. Gortre was not one of those narrow, and even ill-bred, young priests with a text for ever on his lips, a sort of inopportune concordance, with an unpleasant flavour of omniscience. His religion and Helena's was too deep and fibrous a thing for commonplaces about it. It did not continually effervesce within and break forth in minute and constant bubbles, losing all its sincerity and beauty by the vulgar wear and tear of a verbal trick.

But it was always and for ever with him a transmuting force which changed his life each hour in a way of which the nominal believer has no conception.

A letter he had once written to Helena during a holiday compressed all his belief, and his joy in his belief, into a few short lines. Thus had run the sincere and simple statement, unadorned by any effort of literary grace to give it point and force: —

"Day by day as your letters come I go on saying my prayers for you, and with you, in fresh faith and confidence. You know that I absolutely trust the Lord Jesus Christ, who is, I believe, the God who made the worlds, and that I pray to Him continually, relying on His promises.

"I keep on reading all sides of the question, as your father does also, and while admitting all that honest criticism and sincere intellectual doubt can teach me, and freely conceding that there is no infallible record in the New Testament, I grow more and more convinced that the Gospels and Paul's letters relate *facts* and not imaginations or hallucinations. And the more strongly my intellect is convinced, so much more does my heart delight in the love of God, who has given Himself for me. How magnificent is that finale of St. John's Gospel! 'Thomas saith unto Him, My Lord and my God.' And, then, how exquisite is the supplement about the manifestation at the lake side! Imagine the skill of the literary man who invented that! Fancy such a man existing in a. d. 150 or thereabouts! I see Mrs. Humphry Ward says 'it was a dream which the old man at Ephesus related, and his disciples thought it was fact.' And *she* is a literary person!"

So, as the lovers glided slowly past the high symbol of God's pain, the worship in their hearts found but little utterance on their lips, though they were deeply touched.

It seemed a good omen to welcome them to France!

Spence remained to look after the luggage and to see it through the Customs, and the three others resolved to walk to the rooms which they had taken in the Faubourg de la Barre on the steep hill behind the château.

They passed over the railway line in the middle of the road, and past the *cafés* which cluster round the landing-stage, into the quaint market-place, with the great Gothic Cathedral Church of St. Jacques upon one side, and the colossal statue of Duquesne surrounded by baskets of spring flowers in the centre.

To Helena Byars that simple progress was one of unalloyed excitement and delight. The small and wiry soldiers in their unfamiliar uniforms; an officer sipping vermouth in a *café*, with spurs, sword, and helmet shining in the sun; two black priests, with huge furry hats – all the moving colour of the scene gave her new and delightful sensations.

"It's all so different!" she said breathlessly. "So bright and gay. What is that red thing over the tobacco shop, and that little brass dish over the hair-dresser's? Think of Walktown or Salford, now!"

The house in the Faubourg de la Barre was kept by a Madame Varnier, who spoke English well, and was in the habit of letting her rooms to English people. A late *déjeuner* was ready for them.

The omelette was a revelation to Helena, and the *rognons sautés* filled her with respect for such cooking, but she was impatient, nevertheless, to be out and sight-seeing.

The vicar was tired, and proposed to stay indoors with the *Spectator*, and Spence had some letters to write, so Basil and Helena went out alone.

"The vicar and I will meet you at six," Spence said, "at the Café des Tribuneaux, that big place with the gabled roof in the centre of the town. At six the *l'heure verre* begins, the time when everyone goes out for an *apéritif*, the appetiser before dinner; afterwards I'll take you to dine at the Pannier d'Or, a jolly little restaurant I know of, and in the evening we'll go to the Casino."

Madame Varnier, the *patronne*, was in her kitchen sitting-room at the bottom of the stairs, and they looked in through the hatchway as they passed to tell her that they were not dining indoors.

On the floor a little girl, with pale yellow hair, an engaging button of three, was playing with a live rabbit, plump and mouse-coloured.

"How sweet!" said Helena, who was in a mood which made her ready to appreciate everything. "Look at the little darling with its pet. Has baby had the rabbit long, Madame Varnier?"

The Frenchwoman smiled lavishly. "Est-elle gentille l'enfant! hein! I bring the lapin chez moi from the magasin yesterday. There was very good lapins yesterday. I buy when I can. Je trouverai ça plus prudent. He is for the déjeuner of mademoiselle to-morrow. I take him so," – she caught up the animal and suited the action to the word, – "I press his throat till his mouth open, and I pour a little cognac into him. Il se meurt, and the flesh have a delicious flavour from the cognac!"

"How perfectly horrible!" said Helena as they came out into the street and walked down the hill. "Fancy seeing one's lunch alive and playing about like that, and then killing it with brandy, too! What pigs these French people are!"

Soon after the cool gloom of St. Remy enveloped them. Under the big dome they lingered for a time, walking from chapel to chapel, where nuns were praying. But it dulled them rather, and they had more pleasure in the grey and Gothic twilight of St. Jacques. Here the eye was uplifted by more noble lines, there was a more mediæval and romantic feeling about the place.

"We will come here to Mass on Sunday," said Basil. "I shall not go to the English Church at all. I never do abroad, and the vicar agrees with me. You see one belongs to the Catholic Church in England. In France one belongs to it, too. The 'Protestant' Church, as they call it, with an English clergyman, is, of course, a Dissenting church here."

"I see your point," said Helena, "though I don't know that I quite agree with it. But I have never been to a Roman Catholic church in England, and I want to see some of the services. 'Bowing down in the House of Rimmon,' Mr. Philemon would call it at Walktown."

They turned down a narrow street of quiet houses, and came out on to the Plage. There were a good many people walking up and down the great promenade from the Casino to the harbour mouth. An air of fulness and prosperity floated round the magnificent hotels which faced the sea.

It was a spring season, owing to the unusual mildness of the weather, and Dieppe was full of people. The Casino was opened temporarily after the long sleep of the winter, and a company was performing there, having come on from the theatre at Rouen.

"What a curious change from the churches and market-place," said Helena. "This is tremendously smart and fashionable. How well-dressed every one is. Look at that red-haired woman with the furs. This is being quite in the world again."

They began a steady walk towards the pier and lighthouse. The wind was fresh, though not troublesome, and at five o'clock the sun, low in the sky, was still bright, and could give his animation to the picture.

The two young people amused themselves by speculations about the varied types of people who passed and repassed them. Gortre wore a suit of very dark grey, with a short coat and an ordinary tweed cap – his holiday suit, he called it – and, except for his clerical collar, there was little to show his calling. He was pleased, with a humorous sense of proprietorship, a kind of vicarious vanity, to notice the attention and admiration excited by the beautiful English girl at his side.

Helena Byars held her own among the cosmopolitan crowd of women who walked on the Plage. Her beauty was Saxon, very English, and not of a type that is always appreciated to its full value on the Continent, but it shone the more from Latin contrasts, and could not escape remark.

Every now and again they turned, at distances of a quarter of a mile or so, and during the recurrence of their beat they began to notice a person whom they met several times, coming and going.

He was an enormously big man, broad and tall, dressed expensively and with care. His size alone was sufficient to mark him out of the usual, but his personality seemed to them no less arresting and strange.

His large, smooth face was fat, the eyes small and brilliant, with heavy pouches under them. His whole manner was a trifle florid and Georgian. Basil said that he seemed to belong to the Prince Regent's period in some subtle way. "I can imagine him on the lawns at Brighton or dining in the Pavilion," he said. "What a sensual, evil face the man has! Of course it may mean nothing, though. The Bishop of – , one of the saints of the time, whose work on the Gospels is the most wonderful thing ever done in the way of Christian apologetics, has a face like one of the grotesque devils carved on the roof of Notre Dame or Lincoln Cathedral. But this man seems by his face to have no soul. One can't feel it is there, as one does, thank God! with most people."

"But what an intellect such a man must have! Look at him now. Look at the shape of his head. And besides, you can see it in his face, despite its sensuality and materialism. He must be some distinguished person. I seem to remember pictures of him, just lately, too, in the illustrated papers, only I can't get a name to them. I'm certain he's English, and some one of importance."

The big man passed them again with a quiet and swift glance of appreciation for Helena. He seemed lonely. Basil and Helena realised that he would have welcomed a chance word of greeting, some overture of friendship, which is not so impossible between English people abroad – even in adjacent Dieppe – as in our own country.

But neither of them responded to the unspoken wish they felt in the stranger. They were quite happy with each other, and presently they saw him light a cigar and turn into one of the great hotels.

They discussed the man for a few minutes – he had made an odd impression on them by his personality – and then found that it was time for the rendezvous at the Café des Tribuneaux.

By this time dusk was falling, and the sea moaned with a certain melancholy. But the town began to be brilliant with electric lights, and the florid Moorish building of the Casino was jewelled everywhere.

They turned away to the left, leaving the sea behind them, and, passing through a narrow street by the Government tobacco factory, came into the town again, and, after a short walk, to the *café*.

The place was bright and animated – lights, mirrors, and gilding, the stir and movement of the pavement, combined to make a novel and attractive picture for the English girl. The night was not

cold, and they sat under the awning at a little round table watching the merry groups with interest. In a few minutes after their arrival they saw Spence and the vicar, now quite restored and well, coming towards them. They had forborne to order anything before the arrival of their companions.

The journalist took them under his wing at once. It amused him to be a cicerone to help them to a feeling of being at home. Gortre and Mr. Byars had been in Switzerland, and the latter at Rome on one occasion, but under the wing of a bishop's son who made his livelihood out of personally conducting parties to Continental towns of interest for a fixed fee. There was little freedom in these cut-and-dried tours, with their lectures *en route* and the very dinners in the hotel ordered for the tourists, and everything so arranged that they need not speak a word of any foreign language.

For the vicar, Spence prescribed a *vermouth sec*; Gortre, a courtesy invalid, was given a minute glass of an amber-coloured liquid with quinine in it – "*Dubonnet*" Spence called it; and Helena had a *sirop of menthe*.

They were all very happy together in the simple-minded, almost childish, way of quiet, intellectual people. Their enjoyment of the novel liqueurs, in a small *café* at tourist-haunted Dieppe, was as great as that of any sybarite at the Hotel Ritz in Paris, or at a rare dinner at Ciro's in Monte Carlo.

Spence ordered an absinthe for himself.

The vicar seemed slightly perturbed. "Isn't that stuff rather dangerous, Spence?" he said, shrinking a little from the glass when the waiter brought it. "I've heard terrible things of it."

"Oh, I know," said the journalist, laughing, "people call it the French national vice and write tirades against it. Of course if it becomes a regular habit it is dangerous, and excess in absinthe is worse than most things. But one glass taken now and again is a wonderful stomachic and positively beneficial. I take one, perhaps, five times in a year and like it. But, like all good things, it is terribly abused both by the people who use it and those who don't."

Suddenly Helena turned to Gortre.

"Oh, look, Basil!" she said. "There is our friend of the Plage – Quinbus Flestrin, the mountain of flesh, you remember your Swift?"

The big stranger, now in evening dress and a heavy fur coat, had just come into the *café* and was sitting there with a cigarette and a Paris paper. He seemed lost in some sort of anxious speculation – at least so it seemed by the drooping of the journal in his massive fingers and the set expression of abstraction which lingered in his eyes and spread a veil over his countenance.

They had all turned at Helena's exclamation and looked towards the other side of the *café*, where the man was sitting.

"Why, that's Sir Robert Llwellyn," said Spence.

The vicar looked up eagerly. "The great authority on the antiquities of the Holy Land?" he said.

"Yes, that's the man. They knighted him the other day. He's supposed to be the greatest living authority, you know."

"Do you know him, then?" asked the vicar.

"Oh, yes," said Spence, carelessly. "One knows every one in my trade. I have to. I've often gone to him for information when anything very special has been discovered. And I've met him in clubs and at lectures or at first nights at the theatre. He is a great play-goer."

"A decent sort of man?" said Gortre in a tone which certainly implied a doubt.

Spence hesitated a moment. "Oh, well, I suppose so," he said carelessly. "There are tales about his private life, but probably quite untrue. He's a man of the world as well as a great scholar, and I suppose the rather unusual combination makes people talk. But he is right up at the top of the tree, – goes everywhere; and he's just been knighted for his work. I'll go over and speak to him."

"If he'll come over," said the vicar, his eyes alight with anticipation and the hope of a talk with this famous expert on the subjects nearest his own heart, "bring him, *please*. There is nothing I should like better than a chat with him. I know his *Modern Discoveries and Holy Writ* almost by heart."

They watched Spence go across to Sir Robert's table. The big man started as he was spoken to, looked up in surprise, then smiled with pleasure, and extended a welcoming hand. Spence sat down beside him and they were soon in the middle of a brisk conversation.

"The poor man looked very bored until Mr. Spence spoke to him," said Helena. "Father, I'm sure you'll have your wish. He seems glad to have some one to talk to."

She was right. After a minute or two the journalist returned with Llwellyn, and the five of them were soon in a full flood of talk.

"I was going to dine alone at my hotel," said the Professor, at length; "but Spence says that he knows of a decent restaurant here. I wonder if you would let me be one of your party? I'm quite alone in Dieppe for a couple of days. I'm waiting for a friend with whom I am going to travel."

"Oh, do come, Sir Robert," said the vicar, with manifest pleasure. "Are you going to be away from England for long?"

"I have leave from the British Museum for a year," said the Professor. "My doctor says that I require absolute rest. I am *en route* for Marseilles and from there to Alexandria."

The Pannier d'Or proved a pleasant little place, and the dinner was excellent. The Professor surprised and then amused the others by his criticism of the viands. He made the dinner his especial business, sent for the cook and had a serious conversation with him, chose the wines with extreme care.

His knowledge of the culinary art was enormous, and he treated it with a kind of reverence, addressing himself more particularly to Helena.

"Yes, Miss Byars, you must be *most* careful in the preparation of really good crayfish soup. This is excellent. The great secret is to flavour with a little lobster spawn and to mix the crumb of a French roll with the stock – white stock of course – before you add the powdered shells and anchovies."

Many times, despite his impatience to get to deeper and more congenial subjects, the vicar smiled at the purring of this gourmet, who seemed to prefer a sauce to an inscription and rissoles to research.

But with the special coffee – covered with fine yellow foam and sweetened with crystals of amber sugar – the vicar's hour came. Sir Robert realised that it was inevitable and with a half sigh gave the required opening.

Once started, his manner changed utterly. The mask of materialism peeled away from his face, which became younger, brighter, as thought animated it, and new, finer lines came out upon it as knowledge poured from him.

The conversation threatened to be a long one. Spence saw that and proposed to go on to the Casino with Helena, leaving the two clergymen with Llwellyn. It was when they had gone that the trio settled down completely.

It resolved itself at first into a duologue between the two elder men. Gortre's knowledge was too general and superficial on these purely antiquarian matters to allow him to take much part in it. He sat sipping his coffee and listening with keen attention and great enjoyment to this talk of experts. He had not liked Llwellyn from the first and could not do so even now, but he was forced to recognise the enormous intellectual activity and power of the big, purring creature before him.

Step by step the two archaeologists went over the new discoveries being made in the ground between the City Wall of Jerusalem and the Hill of "Jeremiah's Grotto." They talked of the blue and purple mosaics found on the Mount of Olives, of all that had been done by the English and German excavators during the past years.

Gradually the discussion became more intimate and began to touch on great issues.

Mr. Byars was in a state of extraordinary interest. His knowledge was wide, and Llwellyn early realised this, speaking to him as an equal, but beside the Professor's all-embracing achievements it was as nothing. The clergyman learnt something fresh, some sudden illuminating point of view, some irradiating fact, at every moment.

"I suppose," Mr. Byars said at length, "that the true situation of the Holy Sepulchre is still a matter of considerable doubt, Professor. Your view would interest me extremely."

"My view," said Llwellyn, with remarkable earnestness and with an emphasis which left no doubt about his convictions, "is that the Sepulchre has not yet been located."

"And your view is authoritative of course," said Mr. Byars.

The Professor bowed.

"That is as it may be," he said, "but I have no doubt upon the subject. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is quite out of the question. There is really no historical evidence for it beyond a foolish dream of the Empress Helena, in a. d. 326. The people who *know* dismiss the traditional site at once. Of course it is *generally* believed, but one cannot expect the world at large to be cognisant of the doings of the authorities. Canon MacColl has said that the traditional site is the real one, and as his name has never been out of the public eye since what were called 'The Bulgarian Atrocities,' they are content to follow his lead. Then there is the question of the second site, in which a great many people believe they have found the true Golgotha and Sepulchre. 'The Gordon Tomb,' as it has been called, excited a great deal of attention at the time of its discovery. You may remember that I went to Jerusalem on behalf of the *Times* to investigate the matter. You may recollect that I proved beyond dispute that the tomb was not Jewish at all, but indubitably Christian and long subsequent to the time of Christ. As a matter of fact, when the tomb was excavated in 1873 it was full of human bones and the mould of decomposed bodies, and there were two red-painted crosses on the walls. The tomb was close to a large Crusading hospice, and I have no doubt that it was used for the burial of pilgrims. Besides, my excavations proved that the second "city wall" must have *included* the new site, so that the Gospel narrative at once demolishes the new theory. I embodied twenty-seven other minor proofs in my letters to the *Times* also. No, Mr. Byars, my conviction is that we are not yet able to locate in any way the position of Golgotha and the Holy Tomb."

"You think that is to come?" asked Gortre.

"*I feel certain*," answered the Professor, with great deliberation and meaning – "*I feel certain that we are on the eve of stupendous discoveries in this direction.*"

His tones were so impressive and so charged with import that the two clergymen looked quickly at each other. It seemed obvious that Llwellyn was aware of some impending discoveries. He must, they knew, be in constant touch with all that was being done in Palestine. Curiously enough, his words gave each of them a certain sense of chill, of uneasiness. There seemed to be something behind them, something of sinister suggestion, which they could not divine or formulate, but merely felt as an action upon the nerves.



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