# JOHN MEADE FALKNER

## THE NEBULY COAT

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# Содержание

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## Prologue

Sir George Farquhar, Baronet, builder of railway-stations, and institutes, and churches, author, antiquarian, and senior partner of Farquhar and Farquhar, leant back in his office chair and turned it sideways to give more point to his remarks. Before him stood an understudy, whom he was sending to superintend the restoration work at Cullerne Minster.

"Well, good-bye, Westray; keep your eyes open, and don't forget that you have an important job before you. The church is too big to hide its light under a bushel, and this Society-for-the-Conservation-of-National-Inheritances has made up its mind to advertise itself at our expense. Ignoramuses who don't know an aumbry from an abacus, charlatans, amateur faddists, they *will* abuse our work. Good, bad, or indifferent, it's all one to them; they are pledged to abuse it."

His voice rang with a fine professional contempt, but he sobered himself and came back to business.

"The south transept roof and the choir vaulting will want careful watching. There is some old trouble, too, in the central tower; and I should like later on to underpin the main crossing

piers, but there is no money. For the moment I have said nothing about the tower; it is no use raising doubts that one can't set at rest; and I don't know how we are going to make ends meet, even with the little that it is proposed to do now. If funds come in, we must tackle the tower; but transept and choir-vaults are more pressing, and there is no risk from the bells, because the cage is so rotten that they haven't been rung for years.

"You must do your best. It isn't a very profitable stewardship, so try to give as good an account of it as you can. We shan't make a penny out of it, but the church is too well known to play fast-and-loose with. I have written to the parson—a foolish old fellow, who is no more fit than a lady's-maid to be trusted with such a church as Cullerne—to say you are coming to-morrow, and will put in an appearance at the church in the afternoon, in case he wishes to see you. The man is an ass, but he is legal guardian of the place, and has not done badly in collecting money for the restoration; so we must bear with him."

# Chapter One

Cullerne Wharf of the Ordnance maps, or plain Cullerne as known to the countryside, lies two miles from the coast to-day; but it was once much nearer, and figures in history as a seaport of repute, having sent six ships to fight the Armada, and four to withstand the Dutch a century later. But in fulness of time the estuary of the Cull silted up, and a bar formed at the harbour mouth; so that sea-borne commerce was driven to seek other havens. Then the Cull narrowed its channel, and instead of spreading itself out prodigally as heretofore on this side or on that, shrunk to the limits of a well-ordered stream, and this none of the greatest. The burghers, seeing that their livelihood in the port was gone, reflected that they might yet save something by reclaiming the salt-marshes, and built a stone dyke to keep the sea from getting in, with a sluice in the midst of it to let the Cull out. Thus were formed the low-lying meadows called Cullerne Flat, where the Freemen have a right to pasture sheep, and where as good-tasting mutton is bred as on any *pré-salé* on the other side of the Channel. But the sea has not given up its rights without a struggle, for with a south-east wind and spring-tide the waves beat sometimes over the top of the dyke; and sometimes the Cull forgets its good behaviour, and after heavy rainfalls inland breaks all bonds, as in the days of yore. Then anyone looking out from upper windows in Cullerne town would think the little place had

moved back once more to the seaboard; for the meadows are under water, and the line of the dyke is scarcely broad enough to make a division in the view, between the inland lake and the open sea beyond.

The main line of the Great Southern Railway passes seven miles to the north of this derelict port, and converse with the outer world was kept up for many years by carriers' carts, which journeyed to and fro between the town and the wayside station of Cullerne Road. But by-and-by deputations of the Corporation of Cullerne, properly introduced by Sir Joseph Carew, the talented and widely-respected member for that ancient borough, persuaded the railway company that better communication was needed, and a branch-line was made, on which the service was scarcely less primitive than that of the carriers in the past.

The novelty of the railway had not altogether worn off at the time when the restorations of the church were entrusted to Messrs Farquhar and Farquhar; and the arrival of the trains was still attended by Cullerne loungers as a daily ceremonial. But the afternoon on which Westray came, was so very wet that there were no spectators. He had taken a third-class ticket from London to Cullerne Road to spare his pocket, and a first-class ticket from the junction to Cullerne to support the dignity of his firm. But this forethought was wasted, for, except certain broken-down railway officials, who were drafted to Cullerne as to an asylum, there were no witnesses of his advent.

He was glad to learn that the enterprise of the Blandamer

Arms led that family and commercial hotel to send an omnibus to meet all trains, and he availed himself the more willingly of this conveyance because he found that it would set him down at the very door of the church itself. So he put himself and his modest luggage inside—and there was ample room to do this, for he was the only passenger—plunged his feet into the straw which covered the floor, and endured for ten minutes such a shaking and rattling as only an omnibus moving over cobble-stones can produce.

With the plans of Cullerne Minster Mr Westray was thoroughly familiar, but the reality was as yet unknown to him; and when the omnibus lumbered into the market-place, he could not suppress an exclamation as he first caught sight of the great church of Saint Sepulchre shutting in the whole south side of the square. The drenching rain had cleared the streets of passengers, and save for some peeping-Toms who looked over the low green blinds as the omnibus passed, the place might indeed have been waiting for Lady Godiva's progress, all was so deserted.

The heavy sheets of rain in the air, the misty water-dust raised by the drops as they struck the roofs, and the vapour steaming from the earth, drew over everything a veil invisible yet visible, which softened outlines like the gauze curtain in a theatre. Through it loomed the Minster, larger and far more mysteriously impressive than Westray had in any moods imagined. A moment later the omnibus drew up before an iron gate, from which a flagged pathway led through the churchyard to the north porch.

The conductor opened the carriage-door.

"This is the church, sir," he said, somewhat superfluously. "If you get out here, I will drive your bag to the hotel."

Westray fixed his hat firmly on his head, turned up the collar of his coat, and made a dash through the rain for the door. Deep puddles had formed in the worn places of the gravestones that paved the alley, and he splashed himself in his hurry before he reached the shelter of the porch. He pulled aside the hanging leather mattress that covered a wicket in the great door, and found himself inside the church.

It was not yet four o'clock, but the day was so overcast that dusk was already falling in the building. A little group of men who had been talking in the choir turned round at the sound of the opening door, and made towards the architect. The protagonist was a clergyman past middle age, who wore a stock, and stepped forward to greet the young architect.

"Sir George Farquhar's assistant, I presume. One of Sir George Farquhar's assistants I should perhaps say, for no doubt Sir George has more than one assistant in carrying out his many and varied professional duties."

Westray made a motion of assent, and the clergyman went on: "Let me introduce myself as Canon Parkyn. You will no doubt have heard of me from Sir George, with whom I, as rector of this church, have had exceptional opportunities of associating. On one occasion, indeed, Sir George spent the night under my own roof, and I must say that I think any young man should be proud

of studying under an architect of such distinguished ability. I shall be able to explain to you very briefly the main views which Sir George has conceived with regard to the restoration; but in the meantime let me make you known to my worthy parishioners —and friends," he added in a tone which implied some doubt as to whether condescension was not being stretched too far, in qualifying as friends persons so manifestly inferior.

"This is Mr Sharnall, the organist, who under my direction presides over the musical portion of our services; and this is Dr Ennefer, our excellent local practitioner; and this is Mr Joliffe, who, though engaged in trade, finds time as churchwarden to assist me in the supervision of the sacred edifice."

The doctor and the organist gave effect to the presentation by a nod, and something like a shrug of the shoulders, which deprecated the Rector's conceited pomposity, and implied that if such an exceedingly unlikely contingency as their making friends with Mr Westray should ever happen, it would certainly not be due to any introduction of Canon Parkyn. Mr Joliffe, on the other hand, seemed fully to recognise the dignity to which he was called by being numbered among the Rector's friends, and with a gracious bow, and a polite "Your servant, sir," made it plain that he understood how to condescend in his turn, and was prepared to extend his full protection to a young and struggling architect.

Beside these leading actors, there were present the clerk, and a handful of walking-gentlemen in the shape of idlers who had strolled in from the street, and who were glad enough to

find shelter from the rain, and an afternoon's entertainment gratuitously provided.

"I thought you would like to meet me here," said the Rector, "so that I might point out to you at once the more salient features of the building. Sir George Farquhar, on the occasion of his last visit, was pleased to compliment me on the lucidity of the explanations which I ventured to offer."

There seemed to be no immediate way of escape, so Westray resigned himself to the inevitable, and the little group moved up the nave, enveloped in an atmosphere of its own, of which wet overcoats and umbrellas were resolvable constituents. The air in the church was raw and cold, and a smell of sodden matting drew Westray's attention to the fact that the roofs were not water-tight, and that there were pools of rain-water on the floor in many places.

"The nave is the oldest part," said the cicerone, "built about 1135 by Walter Le Bec."

"I am very much afraid our friend is too young and inexperienced for the work here. What do *you* think?" he put in as a rapid aside to the doctor.

"Oh, I dare say if you take him in hand and coach him a little he will do all right," replied the doctor, raising his eyebrows for the organist's delectation.

"Yes, this is all Le Bec's work," the Rector went on, turning back to Westray. "So sublime the simplicity of the Norman style, is it not? The nave arcades will repay your close attention;

and look at these wonderful arches in the crossing. Norman, of course, but how light; and yet strong as a rock to bear the enormous weight of the tower which later builders reared on them. Wonderful, wonderful!"

Westray recalled his Chief's doubts about the tower, and looking up into the lantern saw on the north side a seam of old brick filling; and on the south a thin jagged fissure, that ran down from the sill of the lantern-window like the impress of a lightning-flash. There came into his head an old architectural saw, "The arch never sleeps"; and as he looked up at the four wide and finely-drawn semicircles they seemed to say:

"The arch never sleeps, never sleeps. They have bound on us a burden too heavy to be borne. We are shifting it. The arch never sleeps."

"Wonderful, wonderful!" the Rector still murmured. "Daring fellows, these Norman builders."

"Yes, yes," Westray was constrained to say; "but they never reckoned that the present tower would be piled upon their arches."

"What, *you* think them a little shaky?" put in the organist. "Well, I have fancied so, many a time, myself."

"Oh, I don't know. I dare say they will last our time," Westray answered in a nonchalant and reassuring tone; for he remembered that, as regards the tower, he had been specially cautioned to let sleeping dogs lie, but he thought of the Ossa heaped on Pelion above their heads, and conceived a mistrust of the wide crossing-

arches which he never was able entirely to shake off.

"No, no, my young friend," said the Rector with a smile of forbearance for so mistaken an idea, "do not alarm yourself about these arches. 'Mr Rector,' said Sir George to me the very first time we were here together, 'you have been at Cullerne forty years; have you ever observed any signs of movement in the tower?' 'Sir George,' I said, 'will you wait for your fees until my tower tumbles down?' Ha, ha, ha! He saw the joke, and we never heard anything more about the tower. Sir George has, no doubt, given you all proper instructions; but as I had the privilege of personally showing him the church, you must forgive me if I ask you to step into the south transept for a moment, while I point out to you what Sir George considered the most pressing matter."

They moved into the transept, but the doctor managed to buttonhole Westray for a moment *en route*.

"You will be bored to death," he said, "with this man's ignorance and conceit. Don't pay the least attention to him, but there *is* one thing I want to take the first opportunity of pressing on you. Whatever is done or not done, however limited the funds may be, let us at least have a sanitary floor. You must have all these stones up, and put a foot or two of concrete under them. Can anything be more monstrous than that the dead should be allowed to poison the living? There must be hundreds of burials close under the floor, and look at the pools of water standing about. Can anything, I say, be more insanitary?"

They were in the south transept, and the Rector had duly

pointed out the dilapidations of the roof, which, in truth, wanted but little showing.

"Some call this the Blandamer aisle," he said, "from a noble family of that name who have for many years been buried here."

"*Their* vaults are, no doubt, in a most insanitary condition," interpolated the doctor.

"These Blandamers ought to restore the whole place," the organist said bitterly. "They would, if they had any sense of decency. They are as rich as Croesus, and would miss pounds less than most people would miss pennies. Not that I believe in any of this sanitary talk—things have gone on well enough as they are; and if you go digging up the floors you will only dig up pestilences. Keep the fabric together, make the roofs water-tight, and spend a hundred or two on the organ. That is all we want, and these Blandamers would do it, if they weren't curmudgeons and skinflints."

"You will forgive me, Mr Sharnall," said the Rector, "if I remark that an hereditary peerage is so important an institution, that we should be very careful how we criticise any members of it. At the same time," he went on, turning apologetically to Westray, "there is perhaps a modicum of reason in our friend's remarks. I had hoped that Lord Blandamer would have contributed handsomely to the restoration fund, but he has not hitherto done so, though I dare say that his continued absence abroad accounts for some delay. He only succeeded his grandfather last year, and the late lord never showed much interest in this place, and was

indeed in many ways a very strange character. But it's no use raking up these stories; the old man is gone, and we must hope for better things from the young one."

"I don't know why you call him young," said the doctor. "He's young, maybe, compared to his grandfather, who died at eighty-five; but he must be forty, if he's a day."

"Oh, impossible; and yet I don't know. It was in my first year at Cullerne that his father and mother were drowned. You remember that, Mr Sharnall—when the *Corisande* upset in Pallion Bay?"

"Ay, I mind that well enough," struck in the clerk; "and I mind their being married, becos' we wor ringing of the bells, when old Mason Parmiter run into the church, and says: 'Do'ant-'ee, boys—do'ant-'ee ring 'em any more. These yere old tower'll never stand it. I see him rock,' he says, 'and the dust a-running out of the cracks like rain.' So out we come, and glad enough to stop it, too, because there wos a feast down in the meadows by the London Road, and drinks and dancing, and we wanted to be there. That were two-and-forty years ago come Lady Day, and there was some shook their heads, and said we never ought to have stopped the ring, for a broken peal broke life or happiness. But what was we to do?"

"Did they strengthen the tower afterwards?" Westray asked. "Do you find any excessive motion when the peal is rung now?"

"Lor' bless you, sir; them bells was never rung for thirty years afore that, and wouldn't a been rung then, only Tom Leech, he

says: 'The ropes is there, boys; let's have a ring out of these yere tower. He ain't been rung for thirty year. None on us don't recollect the last time he *was* rung, and if 'er were weak then, 'ers had plenty of time to get strong again, and there'll be half a crown a man for ringing of a peal.' So up we got to it, till old Parmiter come in to stop us. And you take my word for it, they never have been rung since. There's only that rope there"—and he pointed to a bell-rope that came down from the lantern far above, and was fastened back against the wall—"wot we tolls the bell with for service, and that ain't the big bell neither."

"Did Sir George Farquhar know all this?" Westray asked the Rector.

"No, sir; Sir George did not know it," said the Rector, with some tartness in his voice, "because it was not material that he should know it; and Sir George's time, when he was here, was taken up with more pressing matters. I never heard this old wife's tale myself till the present moment, and although it is true that we do not ring the bells, this is on account of the supposed weakness of the cage in which they swing, and has nothing whatever to do with the tower itself. You may take my word for that. 'Sir George,' I said, when Sir George asked me—'Sir George, I have been here forty years, and if you will agree not to ask for your fees till my tower tumbles down, why, I shall be very glad.' Ha, ha, ha! how Sir George enjoyed that joke! Ha, ha, ha!"

Westray turned away with a firm resolve to report to headquarters the story of the interrupted peal, and to make an

early examination of the tower on his own behalf.

The clerk was nettled that the Rector should treat his story with such scant respect, but he saw that the others were listening with interest, and he went on:

"Well, 'taint for I to say the old tower's a-going to fall, and I hope Sir Jarge won't ever live to larf the wrong side o' his mouth; but stopping of a ring never brought luck with it yet, and it brought no luck to my lord. First he lost his dear son and his son's wife in Cullerne Bay, and I remember as if 'twas yesterday how we grappled for 'em all night, and found their bodies lying close together on the sand in three fathoms, when the tide set inshore in the morning. And then he fell out wi' my lady, and she never spoke to him again—no, not to the day of her death. They lived at Fording—that's the great hall over there," he said to Westray, jerking his thumb towards the east—"for twenty years in separate wings, like you mi'd say each in a house to themselves. And then he fell out wi' Mr Fynes, his grandson, and turned him out of house and lands, though he couldn't leave them anywhere else when he died. 'Tis Mr Fynes as is the young lord now, and half his life he's bin a wandrer in foreign parts, and isn't come home yet. Maybe he never will come back. It's like enough he's got killed out there, or he'd be tied to answer parson's letters. Wouldn't he, Mr Sharnall?" he said, turning abruptly to the organist with a wink, which was meant to retaliate for the slight that the Rector had put on his stories.

"Come, come; we've had enough of these tales," said the

Rector. “Your listeners are getting tired.”

“The man’s in love with his own voice,” he added in a lower tone, as he took Westray by the arm; “when he’s once set off there’s no stopping him. There are still a good many points which Sir George and I discussed, and on which I shall hope to give you our conclusions; but we shall have to finish our inspection to-morrow, for this talkative fellow has sadly interrupted us. It is a great pity the light is failing so fast just now; there is some good painted glass in this end window of the transept.”

Westray looked up and saw the great window at the end of the transept shimmering with a dull lustre; light only in comparison with the shadows that were falling inside the church. It was an insertion of Perpendicular date, reaching from wall to wall, and almost from floor to roof. Its vast breadth, parcelled out into eleven lights, and the infinite division of the stonework in the head, impressed the imagination; while mullions and tracery stood out in such inky contrast against the daylight yet lingering outside, that the architect read the scheme of subarcuation and the tracery as easily as if he had been studying a plan. Sundown had brought no gleam to lift the pall of the dying day, but the monotonous grey of the sky was still sufficiently light to enable a practised eye to make out that the head of the window was filled with a broken medley of ancient glass, where translucent blues and yellows and reds mingled like the harmony of an old patchwork quilt. Of the lower divisions of the window, those at the sides had no colour to clothe their nakedness, and

remained in ghostly whiteness; but the three middle lights were filled with strong browns and purples of the seventeenth century. Here and there in the rich colour were introduced medallions, representing apparently scriptural scenes, and at the top of each light, under the cusping, was a coat of arms. The head of the middle division formed the centre of the whole scheme, and seemed to represent a shield of silver-white crossed by waving sea-green bars. Westray's attention was attracted by the unusual colouring, and by the transparency of the glass, which shone as with some innate radiance where all was dim. He turned almost unconsciously to ask whose arms were thus represented, but the Rector had left him for a minute, and he heard an irritating "Ha, ha, ha!" at some distance down the nave, that convinced him that the story of Sir George Farquhar and the postponed fees was being retold in the dusk to a new victim.

Someone, however, had evidently read the architect's thoughts, for a sharp voice said:

"That is the coat of the Blandamers—barry nebuly of six, argent and vert." It was the organist who stood near him in the deepening shadows. "I forgot that such jargon probably conveys no meaning to you, and, indeed, I know no heraldry myself excepting only this one coat of arms, and sometimes wish," he said with a sigh, "that I knew nothing of that either. There have been queer tales told of that shield, and maybe there are queerer yet to be told. It has been stamped for good or evil on this church, and on this town, for centuries, and every tavern loafer will talk

to you about the 'nebuly coat' as if it was a thing he wore. You will be familiar enough with it before you have been a week at Cullerne."

There was in the voice something of melancholy, and an earnestness that the occasion scarcely warranted. It produced a curious effect on Westray, and led him to look closely at the organist; but it was too dark to read any emotion in his companion's face, and at this moment the Rector rejoined them.

"Eh, what? Ah, yes; the nebuly coat. Nebuly, you know, from the Latin *nebulum, nebulus* I should say, a cloud, referring to the wavy outline of the bars, which are supposed to represent cumulus clouds. Well, well, it is too dark to pursue our studies further this evening, but to-morrow I can accompany you the whole day, and shall be able to tell you much that will interest you."

Westray was not sorry that the darkness had put a stop to further investigations. The air in the church grew every moment more clammy and chill, and he was tired, hungry, and very cold. He was anxious, if possible, to find lodgings at once, and so avoid the expense of an hotel, for his salary was modest, and Farquhar and Farquhar were not more liberal than other firms in the travelling allowances which they granted their subordinates.

He asked if anyone could tell him of suitable rooms.

"I am sorry," the Rector said, "not to be able to offer you the hospitality of my own house, but the indisposition of my wife unfortunately makes that impossible. I have naturally but

a very slight acquaintance with lodging-houses or lodging-house keepers; but Mr Sharnall, I dare say, may be able to give you some advice. Perhaps there may be a spare room in the house where Mr Sharnall lodges. I think your landlady is a relation of our worthy friend Joliffe, is she not, Mr Sharnall? And no doubt herself a most worthy woman."

"Pardon, Mr Rector," said the churchwarden, in as offended a tone as he dared to employ in addressing so superior a dignitary —"pardon, no relation at all, I assure you. A namesake, or, at the nearest, a very distant connection of whom—I speak with all Christian forbearance—my branch of the family have no cause to be proud."

The organist had scowled when the Rector was proposing Westray as a fellow-lodger, but Joliffe's disclaimer of the landlady seemed to pique him.

"If no branch of your family brings you more discredit than my landlady, you may hold your head high enough. And if all the pork you sell is as good as her lodgings, your business will thrive. Come along," he said, taking Westray by the arm; "I have no wife to be indisposed, so I can offer you the hospitality of my house; and we will stop at Mr Joliffe's shop on our way, and buy a pound of sausages for tea."

# Chapter Two

There was a rush of outer air into the building as they opened the door. The rain still fell heavily, but the wind was rising, and had in it a clean salt smell, that contrasted with the close and mouldering atmosphere of the church.

The organist drew a deep breath.

"Ah," he said, "what a blessed thing to be in the open air again—to be quit of all their niggling and naggling, to be quit of that pompous old fool the Rector, and of that hypocrite Joliffe, and of that pedant of a doctor! Why does he want to waste money on cementing the vaults? It's only digging up pestilences; and they won't spend a farthing on the organ. Not a penny on the *Father Smith*, clear and sweet-voiced as a mountain brook. Oh," he cried, "it's too bad! The naturals are worn down to the quick, you can see the wood in the gutters of the keys, and the pedal-board's too short and all to pieces. Ah well! the organ's like me—old, neglected, worn-out. I wish I was dead." He had been talking half to himself, but he turned to Westray and said: "Forgive me for being peevish; you'll be peevish, too, when you come to my age—at least, if you're as poor then as I am, and as lonely, and have nothing to look forward to. Come along."

They stepped out into the dark—for night had fallen—and plashed along the flagged path which glimmered like a white streamlet between the dark turves.

"I will take you a short-cut, if you don't mind some badly-lighted lanes," said the organist, as they left the churchyard; "it's quicker, and we shall get more shelter." He turned sharply to the left, and plunged into an alley so narrow and dark that Westray could not keep up with him, and fumbled anxiously in the obscurity. The little man reached up, and took him by the arm. "Let me pilot you," he said; "I know the way. You can walk straight on; there are no steps."

There was no sign of life, nor any light in the houses, but it was not till they reached a corner where an isolated lamp cast a wan and uncertain light that Westray saw that there was no glass in the windows, and that the houses were deserted.

"It's the old part of the town," said the organist; "there isn't one house in ten with anyone in it now. All we fashionables have moved further up. Airs from the river are damp, you know, and wharves so very vulgar."

They left the narrow street, and came on to what Westray made out to be a long wharf skirting the river. On the right stood abandoned warehouses, square-fronted, and huddled together like a row of gigantic packing-cases; on the left they could hear the gurgle of the current among the mooring-posts, and the flapping of the water against the quay wall, where the east wind drove the wavelets up the river. The lines of what had once been a horse-tramway still ran along the quay, and the pair had some ado to thread their way without tripping, till a low building on the right broke the line of lofty warehouses. It seemed to be a

church or chapel, having mullioned windows with stone tracery, and a bell-turret at the west end; but its most marked feature was a row of heavy buttresses which shored up the side facing the road. They were built of brick, and formed triangles with the ground and the wall which they supported. The shadows hung heavy under the building, but where all else was black the recesses between the buttresses were blackest. Westray felt his companion's hand tighten on his arm.

"You will think me as great a coward as I am," said the organist, "if I tell you that I never come this way after dark, and should not have come here to-night if I had not had you with me. I was always frightened as a boy at the very darkness in the spaces between the buttresses, and I have never got over it. I used to think that devils and hobgoblins lurked in those cavernous depths, and now I fancy evil men may be hiding in the blackness, all ready to spring out and strangle one. It is a lonely place, this old wharf, and after nightfall—" He broke off, and clutched Westray's arm. "Look," he said; "do you see nothing in the last recess?"

His abruptness made Westray shiver involuntarily, and for a moment the architect fancied that he discerned the figure of a man standing in the shadow of the end buttress. But, as he took a few steps nearer, he saw that he had been deceived by a shadow, and that the space was empty.

"Your nerves are sadly overstrung," he said to the organist. "There is no one there; it is only some trick of light and shade.

What is the building?"

"It was once a chantry of the Grey Friars," Mr Sharnall answered, "and afterwards was used for excise purposes when Cullerne was a real port. It is still called the Bonding-House, but it has been shut up as long as I remember it. Do you believe in certain things or places being bound up with certain men's destinies? because I have a presentiment that this broken-down old chapel will be connected somehow or other with a crisis of my life."

Westray remembered the organist's manner in the church, and began to suspect that his mind was turned. The other read his thoughts, and said rather reproachfully:

"Oh no, I am not mad—only weak and foolish and very cowardly."

They had reached the end of the wharf, and were evidently returning to civilisation, for a sound of music reached them. It came from a little beer-house, and as they passed they heard a woman singing inside. It was a rich contralto, and the organist stopped for a moment to listen.

"She has a fine voice," he said, "and would sing well if she had been taught. I wonder how she comes here."

The blind was pulled down, but did not quite reach the bottom of the window, and they looked in. The rain blurred the pains on the outside, and the moisture had condensed within, so that it was not easy to see clearly; but they made out that a Creole woman was singing to a group of topers who sat by the fire in a

corner of the room. She was middle-aged, but sang sweetly, and was accompanied on the harp by an old man:

> "Oh, take me back to those I love!
> Or bring them here to me!
> I have no heart to rove, to rove
> Across the rolling sea."

"Poor thing!" said the organist; "she has fallen on bad days to have so scurvy a company to sing to. Let us move on."

They turned to the right, and came in a few minutes to the highroad. Facing them stood a house which had once been of some pretensions, for it had a porch carried on pillars, under which a semicircular flight of steps led up to the double door. A street-lamp which stood before it had been washed so clean in the rain that the light was shed with unusual brilliance, and showed even at night that the house was fallen from its high estate. It was not ruinous, but *Ichabod* was written on the paintless window-frames and on the rough-cast front, from which the plaster had fallen away in more than one place. The pillars of the porch had been painted to imitate marble, but they were marked with scabrous patches, where the brick core showed through the broken stucco.

The organist opened the door, and they found themselves in a stone-floored hall, out of which dingy doors opened on both sides. A broad stone staircase, with shallow steps and iron balustrades, led from the hall to the next story, and there was a

little pathway of worn matting that threaded its way across the flags, and finally ascended the stairs.

"Here is my town house," said Mr Sharnall. "It used to be a coaching inn called The Hand of God, but you must never breathe a word of that, because it is now a private mansion, and Miss Joliffe has christened it Bellevue Lodge."

A door opened while he was speaking, and a girl stepped into the hall. She was about nineteen, and had a tall and graceful figure. Her warm brown hair was parted in the middle, and its profusion was gathered loosely up behind in the half-formal, half-natural style of a preceding generation. Her face had lost neither the rounded outline nor the delicate bloom of girlhood, but there was something in it that negatived any impression of inexperience, and suggested that her life had not been free from trouble. She wore a close-fitting dress of black, and had a string of pale corals round her neck.

"Good-evening, Mr Sharnall," she said. "I hope you are not very wet"—and gave a quick glance of inquiry at Westray.

The organist did not appear pleased at seeing her. He grunted testily, and, saying "Where is your aunt? Tell her I want to speak to her," led Westray into one of the rooms opening out of the hall.

It was a large room, with an upright piano in one corner, and a great litter of books and manuscript music. A table in the middle was set for tea; a bright fire was burning in the grate, and on either side of it stood a rush-bottomed armchair.

"Sit down," he said to Westray; "this is my reception-room,

and we will see in a minute what Miss Joliffe can do for *you*." He glanced at his companion, and added, "That was her niece we met in the passage," in so unconcerned a tone as to produce an effect opposite to that intended, and to lead Westray to wonder whether there was any reason for his wishing to keep the girl in the background.

In a few moments the landlady appeared. She was a woman of sixty, tall and spare, with a sweet and even distinguished face. She, too, was dressed in black, well-worn and shabby, but her appearance suggested that her thinness might be attributed to privation or self-denial, rather than to natural habit.

Preliminaries were easily arranged; indeed, the only point of discussion was raised by Westray, who was disturbed by scruples lest the terms which Miss Joliffe offered were too low to be fair to herself. He said so openly, and suggested a slight increase, which, after some demur, was gratefully accepted.

"You are too poor to have so fine a conscience," said the organist snappishly. "If you are so scrupulous now, you will be quite unbearable when you get rich with battening and fattening on this restoration." But he was evidently pleased with Westray's consideration for Miss Joliffe, and added with more cordiality: "You had better come down and share my meal; your rooms will be like an ice-house such a night as this. Don't be long, or the turtle will be cold, and the ortolans baked to a cinder. I will excuse evening dress, unless you happen to have your court suit with you."

Westray accepted the invitation with some willingness, and an hour later he and the organist were sitting in the rush-bottomed armchairs at either side of the fireplace. Miss Joliffe had herself cleared the table, and brought two tumblers, wine-glasses, sugar, and a jug of water, as if they were natural properties of the organist's sitting-room.

"I did Churchwarden Joliffe an injustice," said Mr Sharnall, with the reflective mood that succeeds a hearty meal; "his sausages are good. Put on some more coal, Mr Westray; it is a sinful luxury, a fire in September, and coal at twenty-five shillings a ton; but we must have *some* festivity to inaugurate the restoration and your advent. Fill a pipe yourself, and then pass me the tobacco."

"Thank you, I do not smoke," Westray said; and, indeed, he did not look like a smoker. He had something of the thin, unsympathetic traits of the professional water-drinker in his face, and spoke as if he regarded smoking as a crime for himself, and an offence for those of less lofty principles than his own.

The organist lighted his pipe, and went on:

"This is an airy house—sanitary enough to suit our friend the doctor; every window carefully ventilated on the crack-and-crevice principle. It was an old inn once, when there were more people hereabouts; and if the rain beats on the front, you can still read the name through the colouring—the Hand of God. There used to be a market held outside, and a century or more ago an apple-woman sold some pippins to a customer

just before this very door. He said he had paid for them, and she said he had not; they came to wrangling, and she called Heaven to justify her. 'God strike me dead if I have ever touched your money!' She was taken at her word, and fell dead on the cobbles. They found clenched in her hand the two coppers for which she had lost her soul, and it was recognised at once that nothing less than an inn could properly commemorate such an exhibition of Divine justice. So the Hand of God was built, and flourished while Cullerne flourished, and fell when Cullerne fell. It stood empty ever since I can remember it, till Miss Joliffe took it fifteen years ago. She elevated it into Bellevue Lodge, a select boarding-house, and spent what little money that niggardly landlord old Blandamer would give for repairs, in painting out the Hand of God on the front. It was to be a house of resort for Americans who came to Cullerne. They say in our guide-book that Americans come to see Cullerne Church because some of the Pilgrim Fathers' fathers are buried in it; but I've never seen any Americans about. They never come to me; I have been here boy and man for sixty years, and never knew an American do a pennyworth of good to Cullerne Church; and they never did a pennyworth of good for Miss Joliffe, for none of them ever came to Bellevue Lodge, and the select boarding-house is so select that you and I are the only boarders." He paused for a minute and went on: "Americans—no, I don't think much of Americans; they're too hard for me—spend a lot of money on their own pleasure, and sometimes cut a dash with a big donation,

where they think it will be properly trumpeted. But they haven't got warm hearts. I don't care for Americans. Still, if you know any about, you can say I am quite venal; and if any one of them restores my organ, I am prepared to admire the whole lot. Only they must give a little water-engine for blowing it into the bargain. Shutter, the organist of Carisbury Cathedral, has just had a water-engine put in, and, now we've got our own new waterworks at Cullerne, we could manage it very well here too."

The subject did not interest Westray, and he flung back:

"Is Miss Joliffe very badly off?" he asked; "she looks like one of those people who have seen better days."

"She is worse than badly off—I believe she is half starved. I don't know how she lives at all. I wish I could help her, but I haven't a copper myself to jingle on a tombstone, and she is too proud to take it if I had."

He went to a cupboard in a recess at the back of the room, and took out a squat black bottle.

"Poverty's a chilly theme," he said; "let's take something to warm us before we go on with the variations."

He pushed the bottle towards his friend, but, though Westray felt inclined to give way, the principles of severe moderation which he had recently adopted restrained him, and he courteously waved away the temptation.

"You're hopeless," said the organist. "What are we to do for you, who neither smoke nor drink, and yet want to talk about poverty? This is some *eau-de-vie* old Martelet the solicitor

gave me for playing the Wedding March at his daughter's marriage. 'The Wedding March was magnificently rendered by the organist, Mr John Sharnall,' you know, as if it was the Fourth Organ-Sonata. I misdoubt this ever having paid duty; he's not the man to give away six bottles of anything he'd paid the excise upon."

He poured out a portion of spirit far larger than Westray had expected, and then, becoming intuitively aware of his companion's surprise, said rather sharply: "If you despise good stuff, I must do duty for us both. Up to the top of the church windows is a good maxim." And he poured in yet more, till the spirit rose to the top of the cuts, which ran higher than half-way up the sides of the tumbler. There was silence for a few minutes, while the organist puffed testily at his pipe; but a copious draught from the tumbler melted his chagrin, and he spoke again:

"I've had a precious hard life, but Miss Joliffe's had a harder; and I've got myself to thank for my bad luck, while hers is due to other people. First, her father died. He had a farm at Wydcombe, and people thought he was well off; but when they came to reckon up, he only left just enough to go round among his creditors; so Miss Euphemia gave up the house, and came into Cullerne. She took this rambling great place because it was cheap at twenty pounds a year, and lived, or half lived, from hand to mouth, giving her niece (the girl you saw) all the grains, and keeping the husks for herself. Then a year ago turned up her brother Martin, penniless and broken, with paralysis upon him. He was a harum-

scarum ne'er-do-well. Don't stare at me with that Saul-among-the-prophets look; *he* never drank; he would have been a better man if he had." And the organist made a further call on the squat bottle. "He would have given her less bother if he had drunk, but he was always getting into debt and trouble, and then used to come back to his sister, as to a refuge, because he knew she loved him. He was clever enough—brilliant they call it now—but unstable as water, with no lasting power. I don't believe he meant to sponge on his sister; I don't think he knew he did sponge, only he sponged. He would go off on his travels, no one knew where, though they knew well what he was seeking. Sometimes he was away two months, and sometimes he was away two years; and then, when Miss Joliffe had kept Anastasia—I mean her niece—all the time, and perhaps got a summer lodger, and seemed to be turning the corner, back would come Martin again to beg money for debts, and eat them out of house and home. I've seen that many a time, and many a time my heart has ached for them; but what could I do to help? I haven't a farthing. Last he came back a year ago, with death written on his face. I was glad enough to read it there, and think he was come for the last time to worry them; but it was paralysis, and he a strong man, so that it took that fool Ennefer a long time to kill him. He only died two months ago; here's better luck to him where he's gone."

The organist drank as deeply as the occasion warranted.

"Don't look so glum, man," he said; "I'm not always as bad as this, because I haven't always the means. Old Martelet doesn't

give me brandy every day."

Westray smoothed away the deprecating expression with which he had felt constrained to discountenance such excesses, and set Mr Sharnall's tongue going again with a question:

"What did you say Joliffe used to go away for?"

"Oh, it's a long story; it's the nebuly coat again. I spoke of it in the church—the silver and sea-green that turned his head. He would have it he wasn't a Joliffe at all, but a Blandamer, and rightful heir to Fording. As a boy, he went to Cullerne Grammar School, and did well, and got a scholarship at Oxford. He did still better there, and just when he seemed starting strong in the race of life, this nebuly coat craze seized him and crept over his mind, like the paralysis that crept over his body later on."

"I don't quite follow you," Westray said. "Why did he think he was a Blandamer? Did he not know who his father was?"

"He was brought up as a son of old Michael Joliffe, a yeoman who died fifteen years ago. But Michael married a woman who called herself a widow, and brought a three-year-old son ready-made to his wedding; and that son was Martin. Old Michael made the boy his own, was proud of his cleverness, would have him go to college, and left him all he had. There was no talk of Martin being anything but a Joliffe till Oxford puffed him up, and then he got this crank, and spent the rest of his life trying to find out who his father was. It was a forty-years' wandering in the wilderness; he found this clue and that, and thought at last he had climbed Pisgah and could see the promised land. But he had to

be content with the sight, or mirage I suppose it was, and died before he tasted the milk and honey."

"What was his connection with the nebuly coat? What made him think he was a Blandamer?"

"Oh, I can't go into that now," the organist said; "I have told you too much, perhaps, already. You won't let Miss Joliffe guess I have said anything, will you? She is Michael Joliffe's own child—his only child—but she loved her half-brother dearly, and doesn't like his cranks being talked about. Of course, the Cullerne wags had many a tale to tell of him, and when he came back, greyer each time and wilder-looking, from his wanderings, they called him 'Old Nebuly,' and the boys would make their bow in the streets, and say 'Good-morning, Lord Blandamer.' You'll hear stories enough about him, and it was a bitter thing for his poor sister to bear, to see her brother a butt and laughing-stock, all the time that he was frittering away her savings. But it's all over now, and Martin's gone where they don't wear nebuly coats."

"There was nothing in his fancies, I suppose?" Westray asked.

"You must put that to wiser folk than me," said the organist lightly; "ask the Rector, or the doctor, or some really clever man."

He had fallen back into his sneering tone, but there was something in his words that recalled a previous doubt, and led Westray to wonder whether Mr Sharnall had not lived so long with the Joliffes as to have become himself infected with Martin's delusions.

His companion was pouring out more brandy, and the

architect wished him good-night.

Mr Westray's apartment was on the floor above, and he went at once to his bedroom; for he was very tired with his journey, and with standing so long in the church during the afternoon. He was pleased to find that his portmanteau had been unpacked, and that his clothes were carefully arranged in the drawers. This was a luxury to which he was little accustomed; there was, moreover, a fire to fling cheerful flickerings on spotlessly white curtains and bedlinen.

Miss Joliffe and Anastasia had between them carried the portmanteau up the great well-staircase of stone, which ran from top to bottom of the house. It was a task of some difficulty, and there were frequent pauses to take breath, and settings-down of the portmanteau to rest aching arms. But they got it up at last, and when the straps were undone Miss Euphemia dismissed her niece.

"No, my dear," she said; "let *me* set the things in order. It is not seemly that a young girl should arrange men's clothes. There was a time when I should not have liked to do so myself, but now I am so old it does not very much matter."

She gave a glance at the mirror as she spoke, adjusted a little bit of grizzled hair which had strayed from under her cap, and tried to arrange the bow of ribbon round her neck so that the frayed part should be as far as possible concealed. Anastasia Joliffe thought, as she left the room, that there were fewer wrinkles and a sweeter look than usual in the old face,

and wondered that her aunt had never married. Youth looking at an old maid traces spinsterhood to man's neglect. It is so hard to read in sixty's plainness the beauty of sixteen—to think that underneath the placidity of advancing years may lie buried, yet unforgotten, the memory of suits urged ardently, and quenched long ago in tears.

Miss Euphemia put everything carefully away. The architect's wardrobe was of the most modest proportions, but to her it seemed well furnished, and even costly. She noted, however, with the eye of a sportsman marking down a covey, sundry holes, rents, and missing buttons, and resolved to devote her first leisure to their rectification. Such mending, in anticipation and accomplishment, forms, indeed, a well-defined and important pleasure of all properly constituted women above a certain age.

"Poor young man!" she said to herself. "I am afraid he has had no one to look after his clothes for a long time." And in her pity she rushed into the extravagance of lighting the bedroom fire.

After things were arranged upstairs, she went down to see that all was in order in Mr Westray's sitting-room, and, as she moved about there, she heard the organist talking to the architect in the room below. His voice was so deep and raucous that it seemed to jar the soles of her feet. She dusted lightly a certain structure which, resting in tiers above the chimney-piece, served to surround a looking-glass with meaningless little shelves and niches. Miss Joliffe had purchased this piece-of-resistance when Mrs Cazel, the widow of the ironmonger, had sold her household

effects preparatory to leaving Cullerne.

"It is an overmantel, my dear," she had said to dubious Anastasia, when it was brought home. "I did not really mean to buy it, but I had not bought anything the whole morning, and the auctioneer looked so fiercely at me that I felt I must make a bid. Then no one else said anything, so here it is; but I dare say it will serve to smarten the room a little, and perhaps attract lodgers."

Since then it had been brightened with a coat of blue enamel paint, and a strip of Brusa silk which Martin had brought back from one of his wanderings was festooned at the side, so as to hide a patch where the quicksilver showed signs of peeling off. Miss Joliffe pulled the festoon a little forward, and adjusted in one of the side niches a present-for-a-good-girl cup and saucer which had been bought for herself at Beacon Hill Fair half a century ago. She wiped the glass dome that covered the basket of artificial fruit, she screwed up the "banner-screen" that projected from the mantelpiece, she straightened out the bead mat on which the stereoscope stood, and at last surveyed the room with an expression of complete satisfaction on her kindly face.

An hour later Westray was asleep, and Miss Joliffe was saying her prayers. She added a special thanksgiving for the providential direction to her house of so suitable and gentlemanly a lodger, and a special request that he might be happy whilst he should be under her roof. But her devotions were disturbed by the sound of Mr Sharnall's piano.

"He plays most beautifully," she said to her niece, as she put

out the candle; “but I wish he would not play so late. I am afraid I have not thought so earnestly as I should at my prayers.”

Anastasia Joliffe said nothing. She was grieved because the organist was thumping out old waltzes, and she knew by his playing that he had been drinking.

# Chapter Three

The Hand of God stood on the highest point in all the borough, and Mr Westray's apartments were in the third story. From the window of his sitting-room he could look out over the houses on to Cullerne Flat, the great tract of salt-meadows that separated the town from the sea. In the foreground was a broad expanse of red-tiled roofs; in the middle distance Saint Sepulchre's Church, with its tower and soaring ridges, stood out so enormous that it seemed as if every house in the place could have been packed within its walls; in the background was the blue sea.

In summer the purple haze hangs over the mouth of the estuary, and through the shimmer of the heat off the marsh, can be seen the silver windings of the Cull as it makes its way out to sea, and snow-white flocks of geese, and here and there the gleaming sail of a pleasure-boat. But in autumn, as Westray saw it for the first time, the rank grass is of a deeper green, and the face of the salt-meadows is seamed with irregular clay-brown channels, which at high-tide show out like crows'-feet on an ancient countenance, but at the ebb dwindle to little gullies with greasy-looking banks and a dribble of iridescent water in the bottom. It is in the autumn that the moles heap up meanders of miniature barrows, built of the softest brown loam; and in the turbaries the turf-cutters pile larger and darker stacks of peat.

Once upon a time there was another feature in the view, for

there could have been seen the masts and yards of many stately ships, of timber vessels in the Baltic trade, of tea-clippers, and Indiamen, and emigrant ships, and now and then the raking spars of a privateer owned by Cullerne adventurers. All these had long since sailed for their last port, and of ships nothing more imposing met the eye than the mast of Dr Ennefer's centre-board laid up for the winter in a backwater. Yet the scene was striking enough, and those who knew best said that nowhere in the town was there so fine an outlook as from the upper windows of the Hand of God.

Many had looked out from those windows upon that scene: the skipper's wife as her eyes followed her husband's barque warping down the river for the voyage from which he never came back; honeymoon couples who broke the posting journey from the West at Cullerne, and sat hand in hand in summer twilight, gazing seaward till the white mists rose over the meadows and Venus hung brightening in the violet sky; old Captain Frobisher, who raised the Cullerne Yeomanry, and watched with his spy-glass for the French vanguard to appear; and, lastly, Martin Joliffe, as he sat dying day by day in his easy-chair, and scheming how he would spend the money when he should come into the inheritance of all the Blandamers.

Westray had finished breakfast, and stood for a time at the open window. The morning was soft and fine, and there was that brilliant clearness in the air that so often follows heavy autumn rain. His full enjoyment of the scene was, however, marred by an

obstruction which impeded free access to the window. It was a case of ferns, which seemed to be formed of an aquarium turned upside down, and supported by a plain wooden table. Westray took a dislike to the dank-looking plants, and to the moisture beaded on the glass inside, and made up his mind that the ferns must be banished. He would ask Miss Joliffe if she could take them away, and this determination prompted him to consider whether there were any other articles of furniture with which it would be advisable to dispense.

He made a mental inventory of his surroundings. There were several pieces of good mahogany furniture, including some open-backed chairs, and a glass-fronted book-case, which were survivals from the yeoman's equipment at Wydcombe Farm. They had been put up for auction with the rest of Michael Joliffe's effects, but Cullerne taste considered them old-fashioned, and no bidders were found for them. Many things, on the other hand, such as bead mats, and wool-work mats, and fluff mats, a case of wax fruit, a basket of shell flowers, chairs with worsted-work backs, sofa-cushions with worsted-work fronts, two cheap vases full of pampas-grass, and two candlesticks with dangling prisms, grated sadly on Westray's taste, which he had long since been convinced was of all tastes the most impeccable. There were a few pictures on the walls—a coloured representation of young Martin Joliffe in Black Forest costume, a faded photograph of a boating crew, and another of a group in front of some ruins, which was taken when the Carisbury Field Club made

an expedition to Wydcombe Abbey. Besides these, there were conventional copies in oils of a shipwreck, and an avalanche, and a painting of still-life representing a bowl full of flowers.

This last picture weighed on Westray's mind by reason of its size, its faulty drawing, and vulgar, flashy colours. It hung full in front of him while he sat at breakfast, and though its details amused him for the time, he felt it would become an eyesore if he should continue to occupy the room. In it was represented the polished top of a mahogany table on which stood a blue and white china bowl filled with impossible flowers. The bowl occupied one side of the picture, and the other side was given up to a meaningless expanse of table-top. The artist had perceived, but apparently too late, the bad balance of the composition, and had endeavoured to redress this by a few more flowers thrown loose upon the table. Towards these flowers a bulbous green caterpillar was wriggling, at the very edge of the table, and of the picture.

The result of Westray's meditations was that the fern-case and the flower-picture stood entirely condemned. He would approach Miss Joliffe at the earliest opportunity about their removal. He anticipated little trouble in modifying by degrees many other smaller details, but previous experience in lodgings had taught him that the removal of pictures is sometimes a difficult and delicate problem.

He opened his rolls of plans, and selecting those which he required, prepared to start for the church, where he had to arrange with the builder for the erection of scaffolding.

He wished to order dinner before he left, and pulled a broad worsted-work bell-pull to summon his landlady. For some little time he had been aware of the sound of a fiddle, and as he listened, waiting for the bell to be answered, the intermittance and reiteration of the music convinced him that the organist was giving a violin lesson. His first summons remained unanswered, and when a second attempt met with no better success, he gave several testy pulls in quick succession. This time he heard the music cease, and made no doubt that his indignant ringing had attracted the notice of the musicians, and that the organist had gone to tell Miss Joliffe that she was wanted.

He was ruffled by such want of attention, and when there came at last a knock at his door, was quite prepared to expostulate with his landlady on her remissness. As she entered the room, he began, without turning from his drawings:

"Never knock, please, when you answer the bell; but I do wish you—"

Here he broke off, for on looking up he found he was speaking, not to the elder Miss Joliffe, but to her niece Anastasia. The girl was graceful, as he had seen the evening before, and again he noticed the peculiar fineness of her waving brown hair. His annoyance had instantaneously vanished, and he experienced to the full the embarrassment natural to a sensitive mind on finding a servant's rôle played by a lady, for that Anastasia Joliffe was a lady he had no doubt at all. Instead of blaming her, he seemed to be himself in fault for having somehow brought about

an anomalous position.

She stood with downcast eyes, but his chiding tone had brought a slight flush to her cheeks, and this flush began a discomfiture for Westray, that was turned into a rout when she spoke.

"I am very sorry, I am afraid I have kept you waiting. I did not hear your bell at first, because I was busy in another part of the house, and then I thought my aunt had answered it. I did not know she was out."

It was a low, sweet voice, with more of weariness in it than of humility. If he chose to blame her, she was ready to take the blame; but it was Westray who now stammered some incoherent apologies. Would she kindly tell Miss Joliffe that he would be in for dinner at one o'clock, and that he was quite indifferent as to what was provided for him. The girl showed some relief at his blundering courtesy, and it was not till she had left the room that Westray recollected that he had heard that Cullerne was celebrated for its red mullet; he had meant to order red mullet for dinner. Now that he was mortifying the flesh by drinking only water, he was proportionately particular to please his appetite in eating. Yet he was not sorry that he had forgotten the fish; it would surely have been a bathos to discuss the properties and application of red mullet with a young lady who found herself in so tragically lowly a position.

After Westray had set out for the church, Anastasia Joliffe went back to Mr Sharnall's room, for it was she who had been

playing the violin. The organist sat at the piano, drumming chords in an impatient and irritated way.

"Well," he said, without looking at her as she came in—"well, what does my lord want with my lady? What has he made you run up to the top of the house for now? I wish I could wring his neck for him. Here we are out of breath, as usual, and our hands shaking; we shan't be able to play even as well as we did before, and that isn't saying much. Why," he cried, as he looked at her, "you're as red as a turkey-cock. I believe he's been making love to you."

"Mr Sharnall," she retorted quickly, "if you say those things I will never come to your room again. I hate you when you speak like that, and fancy you are not yourself."

She took her violin, and putting it under her arm, plucked arpeggi sharply.

"There," he said, "don't take all I say so seriously; it is only because I am out of health and out of temper. Forgive me, child; I know well enough that there'll be no lovemaking with you till the right man comes, and I hope he never will come, Anastasia —I hope he never will."

She did not accept or refuse his excuses, but tuned a string that had gone down.

"Good heavens!" he said, as she walked to the music-stand to play; "can't you hear the A's as flat as a pancake?"

She tightened the string again without speaking, and began the movement in which they had been interrupted. But her thoughts

were not with the music, and mistake followed mistake.

"What *are* you doing?" said the organist. "You're worse than you were when we began five years ago. It's mere waste of time for you to go on, and for me, too."

Then he saw that she was crying in the bitterness of vexation, and swung round on his music-stool without getting up.

"Anstice, I didn't mean it, dear. I didn't mean to be such a brute. You are getting on well—well; and as for wasting my time, why, I haven't got anything to do, nor anyone to teach except you, and you know I would slave all day and all night, too, if I could give you any pleasure by it. Don't cry. Why are you crying?"

She laid the violin on the table, and sitting down in that rush-bottomed chair in which Westray had sat the night before, put her head between her hands and burst into tears.

"Oh," she said between her sobs in a strange and uncontrolled voice—"oh, I am so miserable—*everything* is so miserable. There are father's debts not paid, not even the undertaker's bill paid for his funeral, and no money for anything, and poor Aunt Euphemia working herself to death. And now she says she will have to sell the little things we have in the house, and then when there is a chance of a decent lodger, a quiet, gentlemanly man, you go and abuse him, and say these rude things to me, because he rings the bell. How does he know aunt is out? how does he know she won't let me answer the bell when she's in? Of course, he thinks we have a servant, and then *you* make me so sad. I couldn't sleep last night, because I knew you were drinking. I

heard you when we went to bed playing trashy things that you hate except when you are not yourself. It makes me ill to think that you have been with us all these years, and been so kind to me, and now are come to this. Oh, do not do it! Surely we all are wretched enough, without your adding this to our wretchedness."

He got up from the stool and took her hand.

"Don't, Anstice—don't! I broke myself of it before, and I will break myself again. It was a woman drove me to it then, and sent me down the hill, and now I didn't know there was a living soul would care whether old Sharnall drank himself to death or not. If I could only think there was someone who cared; if I could only think you cared."

"Of course I care"—and as she felt his hand tighten she drew her own lightly away—"of course we care—poor aunt and I—or she would care, if she knew, only she is so good she doesn't guess. I hate to see those horrid glasses taken in after your supper. It used to be so different, and I loved to hear the 'Pastoral' and 'Les Adieux' going when the house was still."

It is sad when man's unhappiness veils from him the smiling face of nature. The promise of the early morning was maintained. The sky was of a translucent blue, broken with islands and continents of clouds, dazzling white like cotton-wool. A soft, warm breeze blew from the west, the birds sang merrily in every garden bush, and Cullerne was a town of gardens, where men could sit each under his own vine and fig-tree. The bees issued forth from their hives, and hummed with cheery droning chorus

in the ivy-berries that covered the wall-tops with deep purple. The old vanes on the corner pinnacles of Saint Sepulchre's tower shone as if they had been regilt. Great flocks of plovers flew wheeling over Cullerne marsh, and flashed with a blinking silver gleam as they changed their course suddenly. Even through the open window of the organist's room fell a shaft of golden sunlight that lit up the peonies of the faded, threadbare carpet.

But inside beat two poor human hearts, one unhappy and one hopeless, and saw nothing of the gold vanes, or the purple ivy-berries, or the plovers, or the sunlight, and heard nothing of the birds or the bees.

"Yes, I will give it up," said the organist, though not quite so enthusiastically as before; and as he moved closer to Anastasia Joliffe, she got up and left the room, laughing as she went out.

"I must get the potatoes peeled, or you will have none for dinner."

Mr Westray, being afflicted neither with poverty nor age, but having a good digestion and entire confidence both in himself and in his prospects, could fully enjoy the beauty of the day. He walked this morning as a child of the light, forsaking the devious back-ways through which the organist had led him on the previous night, and choosing the main streets on his road to the church. He received this time a different impression of the town. The heavy rain had washed the pavements and roadway, and as he entered the Market Square he was struck with the cheerfulness of the prospect, and with the air of quiet prosperity which pervaded

the place.

On two sides of the square the houses overhung the pavement, and formed an arcade supported on squat pillars of wood. Here were situated some of the best "establishments," as their owners delighted to call them. Custance, the grocer; Rose and Storey, the drapers, who occupied the fronts of no less than three houses, and had besides a "department" round the corner "exclusively devoted to tailoring"; Lucy, the bookseller, who printed the *Cullerne Examiner*, and had published several of Canon Parkyn's sermons, as well as a tractate by Dr Ennefer on the means adopted in Cullerne for the suppression of cholera during the recent outbreak; Calvin, the saddler; Miss Adcutt, of the toy-shop; and Prior, the chemist, who was also postmaster. In the middle of the third side stood the Blandamer Arms, with a long front of buff, low green blinds, and window-sashes grained to imitate oak. At the edge of the pavement before the inn were some stone mounting steps, and by them stood a tall white pole, on which swung the green and silver of the nebuly coat itself. On either side of the Blandamer Arms clustered a few more modern shops, which, possessing no arcade, had to be content with awnings of brown stuff with red stripes. One of these places of business was occupied by Mr Joliffe, the pork-butcher. He greeted Westray through the open window.

"Good-morning. About your work betimes, I see," pointing to the roll of drawings which the architect carried under his arm. "It is a great privilege, this restoration to which you are called,"

and here he shifted a chop into a more attractive position on the show-board—"and I trust blessing will attend your efforts. I often manage to snatch a few minutes from the whirl of business about mid-day myself, and seek a little quiet meditation in the church. If you are there then, I shall be glad to give you any help in my power. Meanwhile, we must both be busy with our own duties."

He began to turn the handle of a sausage-machine, and Westray was glad to be quit of his pious words, and still more of his insufferable patronage.

# Chapter Four

The north side of Cullerne Church, which faced the square, was still in shadow, but, as Westray stepped inside, he found the sunshine pouring through the south windows, and the whole building bathed in a flood of most mellow light. There are in England many churches larger than that of Saint Sepulchre, and fault has been found with its proportions, because the roof is lower than in some other conventual buildings of its size. Yet, for all this, it is doubtful whether architecture has ever produced a composition more truly dignified and imposing.

The nave was begun by Walter Le Bec in 1135, and has on either side an arcade of low, round-headed arches. These arches are divided from one another by cylindrical pillars, which have no incised ornamentation, as at Durham or Waltham or Lindisfarne, nor are masked with Perpendicular work, as in the nave of Winchester or in the choir of Gloucester, but rely for effect on severe plainness and great diameter. Above them is seen the dark and cavernous depth of the triforium, and higher yet the clerestory with minute and infrequent openings. Over all broods a stone vault, divided across and diagonally by the chevron-mouldings of heavy vaulting-ribs.

Westray sat down near the door, and was so engrossed in the study of the building and in the strange play of the shafts of sunlight across the massive stonework, that half an hour passed

before he rose to walk up the church.

A solid stone screen separates the choir from the nave, making, as it were, two churches out of one; but as Westray opened the doors between them, he heard four voices calling to him, and, looking up, saw above his head the four tower arches. "The arch never sleeps," cried one. "They have bound on us a burden too heavy to be borne," answered another. "We never sleep," said the third; and the fourth returned to the old refrain, "The arch never sleeps, never sleeps."

As he considered them in the daylight, he wondered still more at their breadth and slenderness, and was still more surprised that his Chief had made so light of the settlement and of the ominous crack in the south wall.

The choir is a hundred and forty years later than the nave, ornate Early English, with a multiplication of lancet-windows which rich hood-mouldings group into twos and threes, and at the east end into seven. Here are innumerable shafts of dark-grey purbeck marble, elaborate capitals, deeply undercut foliage, and broad-winged angels bearing up the vaulting shafts on which rests the sharply-pointed roof.

The spiritual needs of Cullerne were amply served by this portion of the church alone, and, except at confirmations or on Militia Sunday, the congregation never overflowed into the nave. All who came to the minster found there full accommodation, and could indeed worship in much comfort; for in front of the canopied stalls erected by Abbot Vinnicomb in 1530 were

ranged long rows of pews, in which green baize and brass nails, cushions and hassocks, and Prayer-Book boxes ministered to the devotion of the occupants. Anybody who aspired to social status in Cullerne rented one of these pews, but for as many as could not afford such luxury in their religion there were provided other seats of deal, which had, indeed, no baize or hassocks, nor any numbers on the doors, but were, for all that, exceedingly appropriate and commodious.

The clerk was dusting the stalls as the architect entered the choir, and made for him at once as the hawk swoops on its quarry. Westray did not attempt to escape his fate, and hoped, indeed, that from the old man's garrulity he might glean some facts of interest about the building, which was to be the scene of his work for many months to come. But the clerk preferred to talk of people rather than of things, and the conversation drifted by easy stages to the family with whom Westray had taken up his abode.

The doubt as to the Joliffe ancestry, in the discussion of which Mr Sharnall had shown such commendable reticence, was not so sacred to the clerk. He rushed in where the organist had feared to tread, nor did Westray feel constrained to check him, but rather led the talk to Martin Joliffe and his imaginary claims.

"Lor' bless you!" said the clerk, "I was a little boy myself when Martin's mother runned away with the soldier, yet mind well how it was in everybody's mouth. But folks in Cullerne like novelties; it's all old-world talk now, and there ain't one perhaps, beside me and Rector, could tell you *that* tale. Sophia Flannery

her name was when Farmer Joliffe married her, and where he found her no one knew. He lived up at Wydcombe Farm, did Michael Joliffe, where his father lived afore him, and a gay one he was, and dressed in yellow breeches and a blue waistcoat all his time. Well, one day he gave out he was to be married, and came into Cullerne, and there was Sophia waiting for him at the Blandamer Arms, and they were married in this very church. She had a three-year-old boy with her then, and put about she was a widow, though there were many who thought she couldn't show her marriage lines if she'd been asked for them. But p'raps Farmer Joliffe never asked to see 'em, or p'raps he knew all about it. A fine upstanding woman she was, with a word and a laugh for everyone, as my father told me many a time; and she had a bit of money beside. Every quarter, up she'd go to London town to collect her rents, so she said, and every time she'd come back with terrible grand new clothes. She dressed that fine, and had such a way with her, the people called her Queen of Wydcombe. Wherever she come from, she had a boarding-school education, and could play and sing beautiful. Many a time of a summer evening we lads would walk up to Wydcombe, and sit on the fence near the farm, to hear Sophy a-singing through the open window. She'd a pianoforty, too, and would sing powerful long songs about captains and moustachers and broken hearts, till people was nearly fit to cry over it. And when she wasn't singing she was painting. My old missis had a picture of flowers what she painted, and there was a lot more sold when they had to give

up the farm. But Miss Joliffe wouldn't part with the biggest of 'em, though there was many would ha' liked to buy it. No, she kep' that one, and has it by her to this day—a picture so big as a signboard, all covered with flowers most beautiful."

"Yes, I've seen that," Westray put in; "it's in my room at Miss Joliffe's."

He said nothing about its ugliness, or that he meant to banish it, not wishing to wound the narrator's artistic susceptibilities, or to interrupt a story which began to interest him in spite of himself.

"Well, to be sure!" said the clerk, "it used to hang in the best parlour at Wydcombe over the sideboard; I seed'n there when I was a boy, and my mother was helping spring-clean up at the farm. 'Look, Tom,' my mother said to me, 'did 'ee ever see such flowers? and such a pritty caterpillar a-going to eat them!' You mind, a green caterpillar down in the corner."

Westray nodded, and the clerk went on:

"'Well, Mrs Joliffe,' says my mother to Sophia, 'I never want for to see a more beautiful picture than that.' And Sophia laughed, and said my mother know'd a good picture when she saw one. Some folks 'ud stand her out, she said, that 'tweren't worth much, but she knew she could get fifty or a hundred pound or more for't any day she liked to sell, if she took it to the right people. *Then* she'd soon have the laugh of those that said it were only a daub; and with that she laughed herself, for she were always laughing and always jolly.

"Michael were well pleased with his strapping wife, and used to like to see the people stare when he drove her into Cullerne Market in the high cart, and hear her crack jokes with the farmers what they passed on the way. Very proud he was of her, and prouder still when one Saturday he stood all comers glasses round at the Blandamer, and bid 'em drink to a pritty little lass what his wife had given him. Now he'd got a brace of 'em, he said; for he'd kep' that other little boy what Sophia brought when she married him, and treated the child for all the world as if he was his very son.

"So 'twas for a year or two, till the practice-camp was put up on Wydcombe Down. I mind that summer well, for 'twere a fearful hot one, and Joey Garland and me taught ourselves to swim in the sheep-wash down in Mayo's Meads. And there was the white tents all up the hillside, and the brass band a-playing in the evenings before the officers' dinner-tent. And sometimes they would play Sunday afternoons too; and Parson were terrible put about, and wrote to the Colonel to say as how the music took the folk away from church, and likened it to the worship of the golden calf, when 'the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up again to play.' But Colonel never took no notice of it, and when 'twas a fine evening there was a mort of people trapesing over the Downs, and some poor lasses wished afterwards they'd never heard no music sweeter than the clar'net and bassoon up in the gallery of Wydcombe Church.

"Sophia was there, too, a good few times, walking round

first on her husband's arm, and afterwards on other people's; and some of the boys said they had seen her sitting with a redcoat up among the juniper-bushes. 'Twas Michaelmas Eve before they moved the camp, and 'twas a sorry goose was eat that Michaelmas Day at Wydcombe Farm; for when the soldiers went, Sophia went too, and left Michael and the farm and the children, and never said good-bye to anyone, not even to the baby in the cot. 'Twas said she ran off with a sergeant, but no one rightly knew; and if Farmer Joliffe made any search and found out, he never told a soul; and she never come back to Wydcombe.

"She never come back to Wydcombe," he said under his breath, with something that sounded like a sigh. Perhaps the long-forgotten break-up of Farmer Joliffe's home had touched him, but perhaps he was only thinking of his own loss, for he went on: "Ay, many's the time she would give a poor fellow an ounce of baccy, and many's the pound of tea she sent to a labourer's cottage. If she bought herself fine clothes, she'd give away the old ones; my missis has a fur tippet yet that her mother got from Sophy Joliffe. She was free with her money, whatever else she mid have been. There wasn't a labourer on the farm but what had a good word for her; there wasn't one was glad to see her back turned.

"Poor Michael took on dreadful at the first, though he wasn't the man to say much. He wore his yellow breeches and blue waistcoat just the same, but lost heart for business, and didn't go to market so reg'lar as he should. Only he seemed to stick closer

by the children—by Martin that never know'd his father, and little Phemie that never know'd her mother. Sophy never come back to visit 'em by what I could learn; but once I seed her myself twenty years later, when I took the hosses over to sell at Beacon Hill Fair.

"That was a black day, too, for 'twas the first time Michael had to raise the wind by selling aught of his'n. He'd got powerful thin then, had poor master, and couldn't fill the blue waistcoat and yellow breeches like he used to, and *they* weren't nothing so gay by then themselves neither.

"'Tom,' he said—that's me, you know—'take these here hosses over to Beacon Hill, and sell 'em for as much as 'ee can get, for I want the money.'

"'What, sell the best team, dad!' says Miss Phemie—for she was standing by—'you'll never sell the best team with White-face and old Strike-a-light!' And the hosses looked up, for they know'd their names very well when she said 'em.

"'Don't 'ee take on, lass,' he said; 'we'll buy 'em back again come Lady Day.'

"And so I took 'em over, and knew very well why he wanted the money; for Mr Martin had come back from Oxford, wi' a nice bit of debt about his neck, and couldn't turn his hand to the farm, but went about saying he was a Blandamer, and Fording and all the lands belonged to he by right. 'Quiries he was making, he said, and gadded about here and there, spending a mort of time and money in making 'quiries that never came to nothing. 'Twas

a black day, that day, and a thick rain falling at Beacon Hill, and all the turf cut up terrible. The poor beasts was wet through, too, and couldn't look their best, because they knowed they was going to be sold; and so the afternoon came, and never a bid for one of 'em. 'Poor old master!' says I to the horses, 'what'll 'ee say when we get back again?' And yet I was glad-like to think me and they weren't going to part.

"Well, there we was a-standing in the rain, and the farmers and the dealers just give us a glimpse, and passed by without a word, till I see someone come along, and that was Sophia Joliffe. She didn't look a year older nor when I met her last, and her face was the only cheerful thing we saw that afternoon, as fresh and jolly as ever. She wore a yellow mackintosh with big buttons, and everybody turned to measure her up as she passed. There was a horse-dealer walking with her, and when the people stared, he looked at her just so proud as Michael used to look when he drove her in to Cullerne Market. She didn't take any heed of the hosses, but she looked hard at me, and when she was passed turned her head to have another look, and then she come back.

"'Bain't you Tom Janaway,' says she, 'what used to work up to Wydcombe Farm?'

"'Ay, that I be,' says I, but stiff-like, for it galled me to think what she'd a-done for master, and yet could look so jolly with it all.

"She took no note that I were glum, but 'Whose hosses is these?' she asked.

"'Your husband's, mum,' I made bold to say, thinking to take her down a peg. But, lor'! she didn't care a rush for that, but 'Which o' my husbands?' says she, and laughed fit to bust, and poked the horse-dealer in the side. He looked as if he'd like to throttle her, but she didn't mind that neither. 'What for does Michael want to sell his hosses?'

"And then I lost my pluck, and didn't think to humble her any more, but just told her how things was, and how I'd stood the blessed day, and never got a bid. She never asked no questions, but I see her eyes twinkle when I spoke of Master Martin and Miss Phemie; and then she turned sharp to the horse-dealer and said:

"'John, these is fine horses; you buy these cheap-like, and we can sell 'em again to-morrow.'

"Then he cursed and swore, and said the hosses was old scraws, and he'd be damned afore he'd buy such hounds'-meat.

"'John,' says she, quite quiet, "tain't polite to swear afore ladies. These here is good hosses, and I want you to buy 'em.'

"Then he swore again, but she'd got his measure, and there was a mighty firm look in her face, for all she laughed so; and by degrees he quieted down and let her talk.

"'How much do you want for the four of 'em, young man?' she says; and I had a mind to say eighty pounds, thinking maybe she'd rise to that for old times' sake, but didn't like to say so much for fear of spoiling the bargain. 'Come,' she says, 'how much? Art thou dumb? Well, if thou won't fix the price, I'll do it for 'ee.

Here, John, you bid a hundred for this lot.'

"He stared stupid-like, but didn't speak.

"Then she look at him hard.

"'You've got to do it,' she says, speaking low, but very firm; and out he comes with, 'Here, I'll give 'ee a hundred.' But before I had time to say 'Done,' she went on: 'No—this young man says no; I can see it in his face; he don't think 'tis enough; you try him with a hundred and twenty.'

"'Twas as if he were overlooked, for he says quite mild, 'Well, I'll give 'ee a hundred and twenty.'

"'Ay, that's better,' says she; 'he says that's better.' And she takes out a little leather wallet from her bosom, holding it under the flap of her waterproof so that the rain shouldn't get in, and counts out two dozen clean banknotes, and puts 'em into my hand. There was many more where they come from, for I could see the book was full of 'em; and when she saw my eyes on them, she takes out another, and gives it me, with, 'There's one for thee, and good luck to 'ee; take that, and buy a fairing for thy sweetheart, Tom Janaway, and never say Sophy Flannery forgot an old friend.'

"'Thank 'ee kindly, mum,' says I; 'thank 'ee kindly, and may you never miss it! I hope your rents do still come in reg'lar, mum.'

"She laughed out loud, and said there was no fear of that; and then she called a lad, and he led off White-face and Strike-a-light and Jenny and the Cutler, and they was all gone, and the horse-dealer and Sophia, afore I had time to say good-night. She

never come into these parts again—at least, I never seed her; but I heard tell she lived a score of years more after that, and died of a broken blood-vessel at Beriton Races."

He moved a little further down the choir, and went on with his dusting; but Westray followed, and started him again.

"What happened when you got back? You haven't told me what Farmer Joliffe said, nor how you came to leave farming and turn clerk."

The old man wiped his forehead.

"I wasn't going to tell 'ee that," he said, "for it do fair make I sweat still to think o' it; but you can have it if you like. Well, when they was gone, I was nigh dazed with such a stroke o' luck, and said the Lord's Prayer to see I wasn't dreaming. But 'twas no such thing, and so I cut a slit in the lining of my waistcoat, and dropped the notes in, all except the one she give me for myself, and that I put in my fob-pocket. 'Twas getting dark, and I felt numb with cold and wet, what with standing so long in the rain and not having bite nor sup all day.

"'Tis a bleak place, Beacon Hill, and 'twas so soft underfoot that day the water'd got inside my boots, till they fair bubbled if I took a step. The rain was falling steady, and sputtered in the naphtha-lamps that they was beginning to light up outside the booths. There was one powerful flare outside a long tent, and from inside there come a smell of fried onions that made my belly cry 'Please, master, please!'

"'Yes, my lad,' I said to un, 'I'm darned if I don't humour 'ee;

thou shan't go back to Wydcombe empty.' So in I step, and found the tent mighty warm and well lit, with men smoking and women laughing, and a great smell of cooking. There were long tables set on trestles down the tent, and long benches beside 'em, and folks eating and drinking, and a counter cross the head of the room, and great tin dishes simmering a-top of it—trotters and sausages and tripe, bacon and beef and colliflowers, cabbage and onions, blood-puddings and plum-duff. It seemed like a chance to change my banknote, and see whether 'twere good and not elf-money that folks have found turn to leaves in their pocket. So up I walks, and bids 'em gie me a plate of beef and jack-pudding, and holds out my note for't. The maid—for 'twas a maid behind the counter—took it, and then she looks at it and then at me, for I were very wet and muddy; and then she carries it to the gaffer, and he shows it to his wife, who holds it up to the light, and then they all fall to talking, and showed it to a 'cise-man what was there marking down the casks.

"The people sitting nigh saw what was up, and fell to staring at me till I felt hot enough, and lief to leave my note where 'twas, and get out and back to Wydcombe. But the 'cise-man must have said 'twere all right, for the gaffer comes back with four gold sovereigns and nineteen shillings, and makes a bow and says:

"'Your servant, sir; can I give you summat to drink?'

"I looked round to see what liquor there was, being main glad all the while to find the note were good; and he says:

"'Rum and milk is very helping, sir; try the rum and milk hot.'

"So I took a pint of rum and milk, and sat down at the nighest table, and the people as were waiting to see me took up, made room now, and stared as if I'd been a lord. I had another plate o' beef, and another rum-and-milk, and then smoked a pipe, knowing they wouldn't make no bother of my being late that night at Wydcombe, when I brought back two dozen banknotes.

"The meat and drink heartened me, and the pipe and the warmth of the tent seemed to dry my clothes and take away the damp, and I didn't feel the water any longer in my boots. The company was pleasant, too, and some very genteel dealers sitting near.

"'My respec's to you, sir,' says one, holding up his glass to me —'best respec's. These pore folk isn't used to the flimsies, and was a bit surprised at your paper-money; but directly I see you, I says to my friends, "Mates, that gentleman's one of us; that's a monied man, if ever I see one." I knew you for a gentleman the minute you come in.'

"So I was flattered like, and thought if they made so much o' one banknote, what'd they say to know I'd got a pocket full of them? But didn't speak nothing, only chuckled a bit to think I could buy up half the tent if I had a mind to. After that I stood 'em drinks, and they stood me, and we passed a very pleasant evening—the more so because when we got confidential, and I knew they were men of honour, I proved that I was worthy to mix with such by showing 'em I had a packet of banknotes handy. They drank more respec's, and one of them said as how the liquor

we were swallowing weren't fit for such a gentleman as me; so he took a flask out o' his pocket, and filled me a glass of his own tap, what his father 'ud bought in the same year as Waterloo. 'Twas powerful strong stuff that, and made me blink to get it down; but I took it with a good face, not liking to show I didn't know old liquor when it come my way.

"So we sat till the tent was very close, and them hissing naphtha-lamps burnt dim with tobacco-smoke. 'Twas still raining outside, for you could hear the patter heavy on the roof; and where there was a belly in the canvas, the water began to come through and drip inside. There was some rough talking and wrangling among folk who had been drinking; and I knew I'd had as much as I could carry myself, 'cause my voice sounded like someone's else, and I had to think a good bit before I could get out the words. 'Twas then a bell rang, and the 'size-man called out, 'Closing time,' and the gaffer behind the counter said, 'Now, my lads, good-night to 'ee; hope the fleas won't bite 'ee. God save the Queen, and give us a merry meeting to-morrow.' So all got up, and pulled their coats over their ears to go out, except half a dozen what was too heavy, and was let lie for the night on the grass under the trestles.

"I couldn't walk very firm myself, but my friends took me one under each arm; and very kind of them it was, for when we got into the open air, I turned sleepy and giddy-like. I told 'em where I lived to, and they said never fear, they'd see me home, and knew a cut through the fields what'd take us to Wydcombe

much shorter. We started off, and went a bit into the dark; and then the very next thing I know'd was something blowing in my face, and woke up and found a white heifer snuffing at me. 'Twas broad daylight, and me lying under a hedge in among the cuckoo-pints. I was wet through, and muddy (for 'twas a loamy ditch), and a bit dazed still, and sore ashamed; but when I thought of the bargain I'd made for master, and of the money I'd got in my waistcoat, I took heart, and reached in my hand to take out the notes, and see they weren't wasted with the wet.

"But there was no notes there—no, not a bit of paper, for all I turned my waistcoat inside out, and ripped up the lining. 'Twas only half a mile from Beacon Hill that I was lying, and I soon made my way back to the fair-ground, but couldn't find my friends of the evening before, and the gaffer in the drinking-tent said he couldn't remember as he'd ever seen any such. I spent the livelong day searching here and there, till the folks laughed at me, because I looked so wild with drinking the night before, and with sleeping out, and with having nothing to eat; for every penny was took from me. I told the constable, and he took it all down, but I see him looking at me the while, and at the torn lining hanging out under my waistcoat, and knew he thought 'twas only a light tale, and that I had the drink still in me. 'Twas dark afore I give it up, and turned to go back.

"'Tis seven mile good by the nigh way from Beacon Hill to Wydcombe; and I was dog-tired, and hungry, and that shamed I stopped a half-hour on the bridge over Proud's mill-head,

wishing to throw myself in and ha' done with it, but couldn't bring my mind to that, and so went on, and got to Wydcombe just as they was going to bed. They stared at me, Farmer Michael, and Master Martin, and Miss Phemie, as if I was a spirit, while I told my tale; but I never said as how 'twas Sophia Joliffe as had bought the horses. Old Michael, he said nothing, but had a very blank look on his face, and Miss Phemie was crying; but Master Martin broke out saying 'twas all make-up, and I'd stole the money, and they must send for a constable.

""'Tis lies,' he said. 'This fellow's a rogue, and too great a fool even to make up a tale that'll hang together. Who's going to believe a woman 'ud buy the team, and give a hundred and twenty pounds in notes for hosses that 'ud be dear at seventy pounds? Who was the woman? Did 'ee know her? There must be many in the fair 'ud know such a woman. They ain't so common as go about with their pockets full of banknotes, and pay double price for hosses what they buy.'

"I knew well enough who'd bought 'em, but didn't want to give her name for fear of grieving Farmer Joliffe more nor he was grieved already, so said nothing, but held my peace.

"Then the farmer says: 'Tom, I believe 'ee; I've know'd 'ee thirty year, and never know'd 'ee tell a lie, and I believe 'ee now. But if thou knows her name, tell it us, and if thou doesn't know, tell us what she looked like, and maybe some of us 'll guess her.'

"But still I didn't say aught till Master Martin goes on:

""Out with her name. He must know her name right enough, if

there ever was a woman as did buy the hosses; and don't you be so soft, father, as to trust such fool's tales. We'll get a constable for 'ee. Out with her name, I say.'

"Then I was nettled like, at his speaking so rough, when the man that suffered had forgiven me, and said:

"'Yes, I know her name right enough, if 'ee will have it. 'Twas the missis.'

"'Missis?' he says; 'what missis?'

"'Your mother,' says I. 'She was with a man, but he weren't the man she runned away from here with, and she made he buy the team.'

"Master Martin didn't say any more, and Miss Phemie went on crying; but there was a blanker look come on old master's face, and he said very quiet:

"'There, that'll do, lad. I believe 'ee, and forgive thee. Don't matter much to I now if I have lost a hundred pound. 'Tis only my luck, and if 'tweren't lost there, 'twould just as like be lost somewhere else. Go in and wash thyself, and get summat to eat; and if I forgive 'ee this time, don't 'ee ever touch the drink again.'

"'Master,' I says, 'I thank 'ee, and if I ever get a bit o' money I'll pay thee back what I can; and there's my sacred word I'll never touch the drink again.'

"I held him out my hand, and he took it, for all 'twas so dirty.

"'That's right, lad; and to-morrow we'll put the p'leece on to trace them fellows down.'

"I kep' my promise, Mr—Mr—Mr—"

"Westray," the architect suggested.

"I didn't know your name, you see, because Rector never introduced *me* yesterday. I kep' my promise, Mr Westray, and bin teetotal ever since; but he never put the p'leece on the track, for he was took with a stroke next morning early, and died a fortnight later. They laid him up to Wydcombe nigh his father and his grandfather, what have green rails round their graves; and give his yellow breeches and blue waistcoat to Timothy Foord the shepherd, and he wore them o' Sundays for many a year after that. I left farming the same day as old master was put underground, and come into Cullerne, and took odd jobs till the sexton fell sick, and then I helped dig graves; and when he died they made I sexton, and that were forty years ago come Whitsun."

"Did Martin Joliffe keep on the farm after his father's death?" Westray asked, after an interval of silence.

They had wandered along the length of the stalls as they talked, and were passing through the stone screen which divides the minster into two parts. The floor of the choir at Cullerne is higher by some feet than that of the rest of the church, and when they stood on the steps which led down into the nave, the great length of the transepts opened before them on either side. The end of the north transept, on the outside of which once stood the chapter-house and dormitories of the monastery, has only three small lancet-windows high up in the wall, but at the south end of the cross-piece there is no wall at all, for the whole space is occupied by Abbot Vinnicomb's window, with its double

transoms and infinite subdivisions of tracery. Thus is produced a curious contrast, for, while the light in the rest of the church is subdued to sadness by the smallness of the windows, and while the north transept is the most sombre part of all the building, the south transept, or Blandamer aisle, is constantly in clear daylight. Moreover, while the nave is of the Norman style, and the transepts and choir of the Early English, this window is of the latest Perpendicular, complicated in its scheme, and meretricious in the elaboration of its detail. The difference is so great as to force itself upon the attention even of those entirely unacquainted with architecture, and it has naturally more significance for the professional eye. Westray stood a moment on the steps as he repeated his question:

"Did Martin keep on the farm?"

"Ay, he kep' it on, but he never had his heart in it. Miss Phemie did the work, and would have been a better farmer than her father, if Martin had let her be; but he spent a penny for every ha'penny she made, till all came to the hammer. Oxford puffed him up, and there was no one to check him; so he must needs be a gentleman, and give himself all kinds of airs, till people called him 'Gentleman Joliffe,' and later on 'Old Neb'ly' when his mind was weaker. 'Twas that turned his brain," said the sexton, pointing to the great window; "'twas the silver and green what done it."

Westray looked up, and in the head of the centre light saw the nebuly coat shining among the darker painted glass with a

luminosity which was even more striking in daylight than in the dusk of the previous evening.

# Chapter Five

After a week's trial, Westray made up his mind that Miss Joliffe's lodgings would suit him. It was true that the Hand of God was somewhat distant from the church, but, then, it stood higher than the rest of the town, and the architect's fads were not confined to matters of eating and drinking, but attached exaggerated importance to bracing air and the avoidance of low-lying situations. He was pleased also by the scrupulous cleanliness pervading the place, and by Miss Joliffe's cooking, which a long experience had brought to some perfection, so far as plain dishes were concerned.

He found that no servant was kept, and that Miss Joliffe never allowed her niece to wait at table, so long as she herself was in the house. This occasioned him some little inconvenience, for his naturally considerate disposition made him careful of overtaxing a landlady no longer young. He rang his bell with reluctance, and when he did so, often went out on to the landing and shouted directions down the well-staircase, in the hopes of sparing any unnecessary climbing of the great nights of stone steps. This consideration was not lost upon Miss Joliffe, and Westray was flattered by an evident anxiety which she displayed to retain him as a lodger.

It was, then, with a proper appreciation of the favour which he was conferring, that he summoned her one evening near teatime,

to communicate to her his intention of remaining at Bellevue Lodge. As an outward and visible sign of more permanent tenure, he decided to ask for the removal of some of those articles which did not meet his taste, and especially of the great flower-picture that hung over the sideboard.

Miss Joliffe was sitting in what she called her study. It was a little apartment at the back of the house (once the still-room of the old inn), to which she retreated when any financial problem had to be grappled. Such problems had presented themselves with unpleasant frequency for many years past, and now her brother's long illness and death brought about something like a crisis in the weary struggle to make two and two into five. She had spared him no luxury that illness is supposed to justify, nor was Martin himself a man to be over-scrupulous in such matters. Bedroom fires, beef-tea, champagne, the thousand and one little matters which scarcely come within the cognisance of the rich, but tax so heavily the devotion of the poor, had all left their mark on the score. That such items should figure in her domestic accounts, seemed to Miss Joliffe so great a violation of the rules which govern prudent housekeeping, that all the urgency of the situation was needed to free her conscience from the guilt of extravagance—from that *luxuria* or wantonness, which leads the van among the seven deadly sins.

Philpotts the butcher had half smiled, half sighed to see sweetbreads entered in Miss Joliffe's book, and had, indeed, forgotten to keep record of many a similar purchase; using that

kindly, quiet charity which the recipient is none the less aware of, and values the more from its very unostentation. So, too, did Custance the grocer tremble in executing champagne orders for the thin and wayworn old lady, and gave her full measure pressed down and running over in teas and sugars, to make up for the price which he was compelled to charge for such refinements in the way of wine. Yet the total had mounted up in spite of all forbearance, and Miss Joliffe was at this moment reminded of its gravity by the gold-foil necks of three bottles of the universally-appreciated Duc de Bentivoglio brand, which still projected from a shelf above her head. Of Dr Ennefer's account she scarcely dared even to think; and there was perhaps less need of her doing so, for he never sent it in, knowing very well that she would pay it as she could, and being quite prepared to remit it entirely if she could never pay it at all.

She appreciated his consideration, and overlooked with rare tolerance a peculiarly irritating breach of propriety of which he was constantly guilty. This was nothing less than addressing medicines to her house as if it were still an inn. Before Miss Joliffe moved into the Hand of God, she had spent much of the little allowed her for repairs, in covering up the name of the inn painted on the front. But after heavy rains the great black letters stared perversely through their veil, and the organist made small jokes about it being a difficult thing to thwart the Hand of God. Silly and indecorous, Miss Joliffe termed such witticisms, and had Bellevue House painted in gold upon the fanlight over the

door. But the Cullerne painter wrote Bellevue too small, and had to fill up the space by writing House too large; and the organist sneered again at the disproportion, saying it should have been the other way, for everyone knew it was a house, but none knew it was Bellevue.

And then Dr Ennefer addressed his medicine to "Mr Joliffe, The Hand"—not even to The Hand of God, but simply The Hand; and Miss Joliffe eyed the bottles askance as they lay on the table in the dreary hall, and tore the wrappers off them quickly, holding her breath the while that no exclamation of impatience might escape her. Thus, the kindly doctor, in the hurry of his workaday life, vexed, without knowing it, the heart of the kindly lady, till she was constrained to retire to her study, and read the precepts about turning the other cheek to the smiters, before she could quite recover her serenity.

Miss Joliffe sat in her study considering how Martin's accounts were to be met. Her brother, throughout his disorderly and unbusinesslike life, had prided himself on orderly and business habits. It was true that these were only manifested in the neat and methodical arrangement of his bills, but there he certainly excelled. He never paid a bill; it was believed it never occurred to him to pay one; but he folded each account to exactly the same breadth, using the cover of an old glove-box as a gauge, wrote very neatly on the outside the date, the name of the creditor, and the amount of the debt, and with an indiarubber band enrolled it in a company of its fellows. Miss Joliffe found

drawers full of such disheartening packets after his death, for Martin had a talent for distributing his favours, and of planting small debts far and wide, which by-and-by grew up into a very upas forest.

Miss Joliffe's difficulties were increased a thousandfold by a letter which had reached her some days before, and which raised a case of conscience. It lay open on the little table before her:

> "139, New Bond Street.
>
> "Madam,
>
> "We are entrusted with a commission to purchase several pictures of still-life, and believe that you have a large painting of flowers for the acquiring of which we should be glad to treat. The picture to which we refer was formerly in the possession of the late Michael Joliffe, Esquire, and consists of a basket of flowers on a mahogany table, with a caterpillar in the left-hand corner. We are so sure of our client's taste and of the excellence of the painting that we are prepared to offer for it a sum of fifty pounds, and to dispense with any previous inspection.
>
> "We shall be glad to receive a reply at your early convenience, and in the meantime
>
> "We remain, madam,
>
> "Your most obedient servants,
>
> "Baunton and Lutterworth."

Miss Joliffe read this letter for the hundredth time, and dwelt with unabated complacency on the "formerly in the possession of the late Michael Joliffe, Esquire." There was about the phrase

something of ancestral dignity and importance that gratified her, and dulled the sordid bitterness of her surroundings. "The late Michael Joliffe, Esquire"—it read like a banker's will; and she was once more Euphemia Joliffe, a romantic girl sitting in Wydcombe church of a summer Sunday morning, proud of a new sprigged muslin, and proud of many tablets to older Joliffes on the walls about her; for yeomen in Southavonshire have pedigrees as well as Dukes.

At first sight it seemed as if Providence had offered her in this letter a special solution of her difficulties, but afterwards scruples had arisen that barred the way of escape. "A large painting of flowers"—her father had been proud of it—proud of his worthless wife's work; and when she herself was a little child, had often held her up in his arms to see the shining table-top and touch the caterpillar. The wound his wife had given him must still have been raw, for that was only a year after Sophia had left him and the children; yet he was proud of her cleverness, and perhaps not without hope of her coming back. And when he died he left to poor Euphemia, then half-way through the dark gorge of middle age, an old writing-desk full of little tokens of her mother—the pair of gloves she wore at her wedding, a flashy brooch, a pair of flashy earrings, and many other unconsidered trifles that he had cherished. He left her, too, Sophia's long wood paint-box, with its little bottles of coloured powders for mixing oil-paints, and this same "basket of flowers on a mahogany table, with a caterpillar in the left-hand corner."

There had always been a tradition as to the value of this picture. Her father had spoken little of his wife to the children, and it was only piecemeal, as she grew into womanhood, that Miss Euphemia learnt from hints and half-told truths the story of her mother's shame. But Michael Joliffe was known to have considered this painting his wife's masterpiece, and old Mrs Janaway reported that Sophia had told her many a time it would fetch a hundred pounds. Miss Euphemia herself never had any doubt as to its worth, and so the offer in this letter occasioned her no surprise. She thought, in fact, that the sum named was considerably less than its market value, but sell it she could not. It was a sacred trust, and the last link (except the silver spoons marked "J.") that bound the squalid present to the comfortable past. It was an heirloom, and she could never bring herself to part with it.

Then the bell rang, and she slipped the letter into her pocket, smoothed the front of her dress, and climbed the stone stairs to see what Mr Westray wanted. The architect told her that he hoped to remain as her lodger during his stay in Cullerne, and he was pleased at his own magnanimity when he saw what pleasure the announcement gave Miss Joliffe. She felt it as a great relief, and consented readily enough to take away the ferns, and the mats, and the shell flowers, and the wax fruit, and to make sundry small alterations of the furniture which he desired. It seemed to her, indeed, that, considering he was an architect, Mr Westray's taste was strangely at fault; but she extended to him all possible

forbearance, in view of his kindly manner and of his intention to remain with her. Then the architect approached the removal of the flower-painting. He hinted delicately that it was perhaps rather too large for the room, and that he should be glad of the space to hang a plan of Cullerne Church, to which he would have constantly to refer. The rays of the setting sun fell full on the picture at the time, and, lighting up its vulgar showiness, strengthened him in his resolution to be free of it at any cost. But the courage of his attack flagged a little, as he saw the look of dismay which overspread Miss Joliffe's face.

"I think, you know, it is a little too bright and distracting for this room, which will really be my workshop."

Miss Joliffe was now convinced that her lodger was devoid of all appreciation, and she could not altogether conceal her surprise and sadness in replying:

"I am sure I want to oblige you in every way, sir, and to make you comfortable, for I always hope to have gentlefolk for my lodgers, and could never bring myself to letting the rooms down by taking anyone who was not a gentleman; but I hope you will not ask me to move the picture. It has hung here ever since I took the house, and my brother, 'the late Martin Joliffe'"—she was unconsciously influenced by the letter which she had in her pocket, and almost said "the late Martin Joliffe, Esquire"—"thought very highly of it, and used to sit here for hours in his last illness studying it. I hope you will not ask me to move the picture. You may not be aware, perhaps, that, besides

being painted by my mother, it is in itself a very valuable work of art."

There was a suggestion, however faint, in her words, of condescension for her lodger's bad taste, and a desire to enlighten his ignorance which nettled Westray; and he contrived in his turn to throw a tone of superciliousness into his reply.

"Oh, of course, if you wish it to remain from sentimental reasons, I have nothing more to say, and I must not criticise your mother's work; but—" And he broke off, seeing that the old lady took the matter so much to heart, and being sorry that he had been ruffled at a trifle.

Miss Joliffe gulped down her chagrin. It was the first time she had heard the picture openly disparaged, though she had thought that on more than one occasion it had not been appreciated so much as it deserved. But she carried a guarantee of its value in her pocket, and could afford to be magnanimous.

"It has always been considered very valuable," she went on, "though I daresay I do not myself understand all its beauties, because I have not been sufficiently trained in art. But I am quite sure that it could be sold for a great deal of money, if I could only bring myself to part with it."

Westray was irritated by the hint that he knew little of art, and his sympathy for his landlady in her family attachment to the picture was much discounted by what he knew must be wilful exaggeration as to its selling value.

Miss Joliffe read his thoughts, and took a piece of paper from

her pocket.

"I have here," she said, "an offer of fifty pounds for the picture from some gentlemen in London. Please read it, that you may see it is not I who am mistaken."

She held him out the dealers' letter, and Westray took it to humour her. He read it carefully, and wondered more and more as he went on. What could be the explanation? Could the offer refer to some other picture? for he knew Baunton and Lutterworth as being most reputable among London picture-dealers; and the idea of the letter being a hoax was precluded by the headed paper and general style of the communication. He glanced at the picture. The sunlight was still on it, and it stood out more hideous than ever; but his tone was altered as he spoke again to Miss Joliffe.

"Do you think," he said, "that this is the picture mentioned? Have you no other pictures?"

"No, nothing of this sort. It is certainly this one; you see, they speak of the caterpillar in the corner." And she pointed to the bulbous green animal that wriggled on the table-top.

"So they do," he said; "but how did they know anything about it?"—quite forgetting the question of its removal in the new problem that was presented.

"Oh, I fancy that most really good paintings are well-known to dealers. This is not the first inquiry we have had, for the very day of my dear brother's death a gentleman called here about it. None of us were at home except my brother, so I did not see him;

but I believe he wanted to buy it, only my dear brother would never have consented to its being sold."

"It seems to me a handsome offer," Westray said; "I should think very seriously before I refused it."

"Yes, it is very serious to me in my position," answered Miss Joliffe; "for I am not rich; but I could not sell this picture. You see, I have known it ever since I was a little girl, and my father set such store by it. I hope, Mr Westray, you will not want it moved. I think, if you let it stop a little, you will get to like it very much yourself."

Westray did not press the matter further; he saw it was a sore point with his landlady, and reflected that he might hang a plan in front of the painting, if need be, as a temporary measure. So a concordat was established, and Miss Joliffe put Baunton and Lutterworth's letter back into her pocket, and returned to her accounts with equanimity at least partially restored.

After she had left the room, Westray examined the picture once more, and more than ever was he convinced of its worthlessness. It had all the crude colouring and hard outlines of the worst amateur work, and gave the impression of being painted with no other object than to cover a given space. This view was, moreover, supported by the fact that the gilt frame was exceptionally elaborate and well made, and he came to the conclusion that Sophia must somehow have come into possession of the frame, and had painted the flower-piece to fill it.

The sun was a red ball on the horizon as he flung up the

window and looked out over the roofs towards the sea. The evening was very still, and the town lay steeped in deep repose. The smoke hung blue above it in long, level strata, and there was perceptible in the air a faint smell of burning weeds. The belfry story of the centre tower glowed with a pink flush in the sunset, and a cloud of jackdaws wheeled round the golden vanes, chattering and fluttering before they went to bed.

"It is a striking scene, is it not?" said a voice at his elbow; "there is a curious aromatic scent in this autumn air that makes one catch one's breath." It was the organist who had slipped in unawares. "I feel down on my luck," he said. "Take your supper in my room to-night, and let us have a talk."

Westray had not seen much of him for the last few days, and agreed gladly enough that they should spend the evening together; only the venue was changed, and supper taken in the architect's room. They talked over many things that night, and Westray let his companion ramble on to his heart's content about Cullerne men and manners; for he was of a receptive mind, and anxious to learn what he could about those among whom he had taken up his abode.

He told Mr Sharnall of his conversation with Miss Joliffe, and of the unsuccessful attempt to get the picture removed. The organist knew all about Baunton and Lutterworth's letter.

"The poor thing has made the question a matter of conscience for the last fortnight," he said, "and worried herself into many a sleepless night over that picture. 'Shall I sell it, or shall I

not?' 'Yes,' says poverty—'sell it, and show a brave front to your creditors.' 'Yes,' say Martin's debts, clamouring about her with open mouths, like a nest of young starlings, 'sell it, and satisfy us.' 'No,' says pride, 'don't sell it; it is a patent of respectability to have an oil-painting in the house.' 'No,' says family affection, and the queer little piping voice of her own childhood—'don't sell it. Don't you remember how fond poor daddy was of it, and how dear Martin treasured it?' 'Dear Martin'—psh! Martin never did her anything but evil turns all his threescore years, but women canonise their own folk when they die. Haven't you seen what they call a religious woman damn the whole world for evil-doers? and then her husband or her brother dies, and may have lived as ill a life as any other upon earth, but she don't damn him. Love bids her penal code halt; she makes a way of escape for her own, and speaks of dear Dick and dear Tom for all the world as if they had been double Baxter-saints. No, blood is thicker than water; damnation doesn't hold good for her own. Love is stronger than hell-fire, and works a miracle for Dick and Tom; only *she* has to make up the balance by giving other folks an extra dose of brimstone.

"Lastly, worldly wisdom, or what Miss Joliffe thinks wisdom, says, 'No, don't sell it; you should get more than fifty pounds for such a gem.' So she is tossed about, and if she'd lived when there were monks in Cullerne Church, she would have asked her father confessor, and he would have taken down his 'Summa Angelica,' and looked it out under V.—'*Vendetur? utrum vendetur an*

*non*?'—and set her mind at rest. You didn't know I could chaffer Latin with the best of 'em, did you? Ah, but I can, even with the Rector, for all the *nebulus* and *nebulum*; only I don't trot it out too often. I'll show you a copy of the 'Summa' when you come down to my room; but there aren't any confessors now, and dear Protestant Parkyn couldn't read the 'Summa' if he had it; so there is no one to settle the case for her."

The little man had worked himself into a state of exaltation, and his eyes twinkled as he spoke of his scholastic attainments. "Latin," he said—"damn it! I can talk Latin against anyone—yes, with Beza himself—and could tell you tales in it which would make you stop your ears. Ah, well, more fool I—more fool I. '*Contentus esto, Paule mi, lasciva, Paule, pagina*,'" he muttered to himself, and drummed nervously with his fingers on the table.

Westray was apprehensive of these fits of excitement, and led the conversation back to the old theme.

"It baffles me to understand how *anyone* with eyes at all could think a daub like this was valuable—that is strange enough; but how come these London people to have made an offer for it? I know the firm quite well; they are first-rate dealers."

"There are some people," said the organist, "who can't tell 'Pop goes the weasel' from the 'Hallelujah Chorus,' and others are as bad with pictures. I'm very much that way myself. No doubt all you say is right, and this picture an eyesore to any respectable person, but I've been used to it so long I've got to like it, and should be sorry to see her sell it. And as for these London

buyers, I suppose some other ignoramus has taken a fancy to it, and wants to buy. You see, there *have* been chance visitors staying in this room a night or two between whiles—perhaps even Americans, for all I said about them—and you can never reckon what *they'll* do. The very day Martin Joliffe died there was a story of someone coming to buy the picture of him. I was at church in the afternoon, and Miss Joliffe at the Dorcas meeting, and Anastasia gone out to the chemist. When I got back, I came up to see Martin in this same room, and found him full of a tale that he had heard the bell ring, and after that someone walking in the house, and last his door opened, and in walked a stranger. Martin was sitting in the chair I'm using now, and was too weak then to move out of it; so he was forced to sit until this man came in. The stranger talked kindly to him, so he said, and wanted to buy the picture of the flowers, bidding as high as twenty pounds for it; but Martin wouldn't hear him, and said he wouldn't let him have it for ten times that, and then the man went away. That was the story, and I thought at the time 'twas all a cock-and-bull tale, and that Martin's mind was wandering; for he was very weak, and seemed flushed too, like one just waken from a dream. But he had a cunning look in his eye when he told me, and said if he lived another week he would be Lord Blandamer himself, and wouldn't want then to sell any pictures. He spoke of it again when his sister came back, but couldn't say what the man was like, except that his hair reminded him of Anastasia's.

"But Martin's time was come; he died that very night, and

Miss Joliffe was terribly cast down, because she feared she had given him an overdose of sleeping-draught; for Ennefer told her he had taken too much, and she didn't see where he had got it from unless she gave it him by mistake. Ennefer wrote the death certificate, and so there was no inquest; but that put the stranger out of our thoughts until it was too late to find him, if, indeed, he ever was anything more than the phantom of a sick man's brain. No one beside had seen him, and all we had to ask for was a man with wavy hair, because he reminded Martin of Anastasia. But if 'twas true, then there was someone else who had a fancy for the painting, and poor old Michael must have thought a lot of it to frame it in such handsome style."

"I don't know," Westray said; "it looks to me as if the picture was painted to fill the frame."

"Perhaps so, perhaps so," answered the organist dryly. "What made Martin Joliffe think he was so near success?"

"Ah, that I can't tell you. He was always thinking he had squared the circle, or found the missing bit to fit into the puzzle; but he kept his schemes very dark. He left boxes full of papers behind him when he died, and Miss Joliffe handed them to me to look over, instead of burning them. I shall go through them some day; but no doubt the whole thing is moonshine, and if he ever had a clue it died with him."

There was a little pause; the chimes of Saint Sepulchre's played "Mount Ephraim," and the great bell tolled out midnight over Cullerne Flat.

"It's time to be turning in. You haven't a drop of whisky, I suppose?" he said, with a glance at the kettle which stood on a trivet in front of the fire; "I have talked myself thirsty."

There was a pathos in his appeal that would have melted many a stony heart, but Westray's principles were unassailable, and he remained obdurate.

"No, I am afraid I have not," he said; "you see, I never take spirits myself. Will you not join me in a cup of cocoa? The kettle boils."

Mr Sharnall's face fell.

"You ought to have been an old woman," he said; "only old women drink cocoa. Well, I don't mind if I do; any port in a storm."

The organist went to bed that night in a state of exemplary sobriety, for when he got down to his own room he could find no spirit in the cupboard, and remembered that he had finished the last bottle of old Martelet's *eau-de-vie* at his tea, and that he had no money to buy another.

# Chapter Six

A month later the restoration work at Saint Sepulchre's was fairly begun, and in the south transept a wooden platform had been raised on scaffold-poles to such a height as allowed the masons to work at the vault from the inside. This roof was no doubt the portion of the fabric that called most urgently for repair, but Westray could not disguise from himself that delay might prove dangerous in other directions, and he drew Sir George Farquhar's attention to more than one weak spot which had escaped the great architect's cursory inspection.

But behind all Westray's anxieties lurked that dark misgiving as to the tower arches, and in his fancy the enormous weight of the central tower brooded like the incubus over the whole building. Sir George Farquhar paid sufficient attention to his deputy's representations to visit Cullerne with a special view to examining the tower. He spent an autumn day in making measurements and calculations, he listened to the story of the interrupted peal, and probed the cracks in the walls, but saw no reason to reconsider his former verdict or to impugn the stability of the tower. He gently rallied Westray on his nervousness, and, whilst he agreed that in other places repair was certainly needed, he pointed out that lack of funds must unfortunately limit for the present both the scope of operations and the rate of progress.

Cullerne Abbey was dissolved with the larger religious

houses in 1539, when Nicholas Vinnicomb, the last abbot, being recalcitrant, and refusing to surrender his house, was hanged as a traitor in front of the great West Gate-house. The general revenues were impropriated by the King's Court of Augmentations, and the abbey lands in the immediate vicinity were given to Shearman, the King's Physician. Spellman, in his book on sacrilege, cites Cullerne as an instance where church lands brought ruin to their new owner's family; for Shearman had a spendthrift son who squandered his patrimony, and then, caballing with Spanish intriguants, came to the block in Queen Elizabeth's days.

> "For evil hands have abbey lands,
> Such evil fate in store;
> Such is the heritage that waits
> Church-robbers evermore."

Thus, in the next generation the name of Shearman was clean put away; but Sir John Fynes, purchasing the property, founded the Grammar School and almshouses as a sin-offering for the misdoings of his predecessors. This measure of atonement succeeded admirably, for Horatio Fynes was ennobled by James the First, and his family, with the title of Blandamer, endures to this present.

On the day before the formal dissolution of their house the monks sung the last service in the abbey church. It was held late in the evening, partly because this time seemed to befit such a

farewell, and partly that less public attention might be attracted; for there was a doubt whether the King's servants would permit any further ceremonies. Six tall candles burnt upon the altar, and the usual sconces lit the service-books that lay before the brothers in the choir-stalls. It was a sad service, as every good and amiable thing is sad when done for the last time. There were agonising hearts among the brothers, especially among the older monks, who knew not whither to go on the morrow; and the voice of the sub-prior was broken with grief, and failed him as he read the lesson.

The nave was in darkness except for the warming-braziers, which here and there cast a ruddy glow on the vast Norman pillars. In the obscurity were gathered little groups of townsmen. The nave had always been open for their devotions in happier days, and at the altars of its various chapels they were accustomed to seek the means of grace. That night they met for the last time—some few as curious spectators, but most in bitterness of heart and profound sorrow, that the great church with its splendid services was lost to them for ever. They clustered between the pillars of the arcades; and, the doors that separated the nave from the choir being open, they could look through the stone screen, and see the serges twinking far away on the high altar.

Among all the sad hearts in the abbey church, there was none sadder than that of Richard Vinnicomb, merchant and wool-stapler. He was the abbot's elder brother, and to all the bitterness naturally incident to the occasion was added in his case the grief

that his brother was a prisoner in London, and would certainly be tried for his life.

He stood in the deep shadow of the pier that supported the north-west corner of the tower, weighed down with sorrow for the abbot and for the fall of the abbey, and uncertain whether his brother's condemnation would not involve his own ruin. It was December 6, Saint Nicholas' Day, the day of the abbot's patron saint. He was near enough to the choir to hear the collect being read on the other side of the screen:

"*Deus qui beatum Nicolaum pontificem innumeris decorasti miraculis: tribue quaesumus ut ejus mentis, et precibus, a gehennae incendiis liberemur, per Dominum nostrum Jesum Christum. Amen*."

"Amen," he said in the shadow of his pillar. "Blessed Nicholas, save me; blessed Nicholas, save us all; blessed Nicholas, save my brother, and, if he must lose this temporal life, pray to our Lord Christ that He will shortly accomplish the number of His elect, and reunite us in His eternal Paradise."

He clenched his hands in his distress, and, as a flicker from the brazier fell upon him, those standing near saw the tears run down his cheeks.

"*Nicholas qui omnem terram doctrina replevisti, intercede pro peccatis nostris*," said the officiant; and the monks gave the antiphon:

"*Iste est qui contempsit vitam mundi et pervenit ad coelestia regna*."

One by one a server put out the altar-lights, and as the last was extinguished the monks rose in their places, and walked out in procession, while the organ played a dirge as sad as the wind in a ruined window.

The abbot was hanged before his abbey gate, but Richard Vinnicomb's goods escaped confiscation; and when the great church was sold, as it stood, for building material, he bought it for three hundred pounds, and gave it to the parish. One part of his prayer was granted, for within a year death reunited him to his brother; and in his pious will he bequeathed his "sowle to Allmyhtie God his Maker and Redemer, to have the fruition of the Deitie with Our Blessed Ladie and all Saints and the Abbey Churche of Saint Sepulchre with the implements thereof, to the Paryshe of Cullerne, so that the said Parishioners shall not sell, alter, or alienate the said Churche, or Implements or anye part or parcell thereof for ever." Thus it was that the church which Westray had to restore was preserved at a critical period of its history.

Richard Vinnicomb's generosity extended beyond the mere purchase of the building, for he left in addition a sum to support the dignity of a daily service, with a complement of three chaplains, an organist, ten singing-men, and sixteen choristers. But the negligence of trustees and the zeal of more religious-minded men than poor superstitious Richard had sadly diminished these funds. Successive rectors of Cullerne became convinced that the spiritual interests of the town would be better

served by placing a larger income at their own disposal for good works, and by devoting less to the mere lip-service of much daily singing. Thus, the stipend of the Rector was gradually augmented, and Canon Parkyn found an opportunity soon after his installation to increase the income of the living to a round two thousand by curtailing extravagance in the payment of an organist, and by reducing the emoluments of that office from two hundred to eighty pounds a year.

It was true that this scheme of economy included the abolition of the week-day morning-service, but at three o'clock in the afternoon evensong was still rehearsed in Cullerne Church. It was the thin and vanishing shadow of a cathedral service, and Canon Parkyn hoped that it might gradually dwindle away until it was dispersed to nought. Such formalism must certainly throttle any real devotion, and it was regrettable that many of the prayers in which his own fine voice and personal magnetism must have had a moving effect upon his hearers should be constantly obscured by vain intonations. It was only by doing violence to his own high principles that he constrained himself to accept the emoluments which poor Richard Vinnicomb had provided for a singing foundation, and he was scrupulous in showing his disapproval of such vanities by punctilious absence from the week-day service. This ceremony was therefore entrusted to white-haired Mr Noot, whose zeal in his Master's cause had left him so little opportunity for pushing his own interests that at sixty he was stranded as an underpaid curate in the backwater of Cullerne.

At four o'clock, therefore, on a week-day afternoon, anyone who happened to be in Saint Sepulchre's Church might see a little surpliced procession issue from the vestries in the south transept, and wind its way towards the choir. It was headed by clerk Janaway, who carried a silver-headed mace; then followed eight choristers (for the number fixed by Richard Vinnicomb had been diminished by half); then five singing-men, of whom the youngest was fifty, and the rear was brought up by Mr Noot. The procession having once entered the choir, the clerk shut the doors of the screen behind it, that the minds of the officiants might be properly removed from contemplation of the outer world, and that devotion might not be interrupted by any intrusion of profane persons from the nave. These outside Profane existed rather in theory than fact, for, except in the height of summer, visitors were rarely seen in the nave or any other part of the building. Cullerne lay remote from large centres, and archaeologic interest was at this time in so languishing a condition that few, except professed antiquaries, were aware of the grandeur of the abbey church. If strangers troubled little about Cullerne, the interest of the inhabitants in the week-day service was still more lukewarm, and the pews in front of the canopied stalls remained constantly empty.

Thus, Mr Noot read, and Mr Sharnall the organist played, and the choir-men and choristers sang, day by day, entirely for clerk Janaway's benefit, because there was no one else to listen to them. Yet, if a stranger given to music ever entered the church at

such times, he was struck with the service; for, like the Homeric housewife who did the best with what she had by her, Mr Sharnall made the most of his defective organ and inadequate choir. He was a man if much taste and resource, and, as the echoes of the singing rolled round the vaulted roofs, a generous critic thought little of cracked voices and leaky bellows and rattling trackers, but took away with him an harmonious memory of sunlight and coloured glass and eighteenth-century music; and perhaps of some clear treble voice, for Mr Sharnall was famed for training boys and discovering the gift of song.

Saint Luke's little summer, in the October that followed the commencement of the restoration, amply justified its name. In the middle of the month there were several days of such unusual beauty as to recall the real summer, and the air was so still and the sunshine so warm that anyone looking at the soft haze on Cullerne Flat might well have thought that August had returned.

Cullerne Minster was, as a rule, refreshingly cool in the warmth of summer, but something of the heat and oppressiveness of the outside air seemed to have filtered into the church on these unseasonably warm autumn days. On a certain Saturday a more than usual drowsiness marked the afternoon service. The choir plumped down into their places when the Psalms were finished, and abandoned themselves to slumber with little attempt at concealment, as Mr Noot began the first lesson. There were, indeed, honourable exceptions to the general somnolence. On the cantoris side the worn-out alto held an animated conversation

with the cracked tenor. They were comparing some specially fine onions under the desk, for both were gardeners and the autumn leek-show was near at hand. On the decani side Patrick Ovens, a red-haired little treble, was kept awake by the necessity for altering *Magnificat* into *Magnified Cat* in his copy of Aldrich in G.

The lesson was a long one. Mr Noot, mildest and most beneficent of men, believed that he was at his best in denunciatory passages of Scripture. The Prayer-Book, it was true, had appointed a portion of the Book of Wisdom for the afternoon lesson, but Mr Noot made light of authorities, and read instead a chapter from Isaiah. If he had been questioned as to this proceeding, he would have excused himself by saying that he disapproved of the Apocrypha, even for instruction of manners (and there was no one at Cullerne at all likely to question this right of private judgment), but his real, though perhaps unconscious, motive was to find a suitable passage for declamation. He thundered forth judgments in a manner which combined, he believed, the terrors of supreme justice with an infinite commiseration for the blindness of errant, but long-forgotten peoples. He had, in fact, that "Bible voice" which seeks to communicate additional solemnity to the Scriptures by reciting them in a tone never employed in ordinary life, as the fledgling curate adds gravity to the Litany by whispering "the hour of death and Day of Judgment."

Mr Noot, being short-sighted, did not see how lightly the

punishments of these ancient races passed over the heads of his dozing audience, and was bringing the long lesson to a properly dramatic close when the unexpected happened: the screen-door opened and a stranger entered. As the blowing of a horn by the paladin broke the repose of a century, and called back to life the spellbound princess and her court, so these slumbering churchmen were startled from their dreams by the intruder. The choir-boys fell to giggling, the choir-men stared, clerk Janaway grasped his mace as if he would brain so rash an adventurer, and the general movement made Mr Sharnall glance nervously at his stops; for he thought that he had overslept himself, and that the choir had stood up for the *Magnificat.*

The stranger seemed unconscious of the attention which his appearance provoked. He was no doubt some casual sightseer, and had possibly been unaware that any service was in progress until he opened the screen-door. But once there, he made up his mind to join in the devotions, and was walking to the steps which led up to the stalls when clerk Janaway popped out of his place and accosted him, quoting the official regulations in something louder than a stage whisper:

"Ye cannot enter the choir during the hours of Divine service. Ye cannot come in."

The stranger was amused at the old man's officiousness.

"I am in," he whispered back, "and, being in, will take a seat, if you please, until the service is over."

The clerk looked at him doubtfully for a moment, but if there

was amusement to be read in the other's countenance, there was also a decision that did not encourage opposition. So he thought better of the matter, and opened the door of one of the pews that run below the stalls in Cullerne Church.

But the stranger did not appear to notice that a place was being shown him, and walked past the pew and up the little steps that led to the stalls on the cantoris side. Directly behind the singing-men were five stalls, which had canopies richer and more elaborate than those of the others, with heraldic escutcheons painted on the backs. From these seats the vulgar herd was excluded by a faded crimson cord, but the stranger lifted the cord from its hook, and sat down in the first reserved seat, as if the place belonged to him.

Clerk Janaway was outraged, and bustled up the steps after him like an angry turkey-cock.

"Come, come!" he said, touching the intruder on the shoulder; "you cannot sit here; these are the Fording seats, and kep' for Lord Blandamer's family."

"I will make room if Lord Blandamer brings his family," the stranger said; and, seeing that the old man was returning to the attack, added, "Hush! that is enough."

The clerk looked at him again, and then turned back to his own place, routed.

"*And in that day they shall roar against thee like the roaring of the sea, and if one look unto the land behold darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof*," said Mr Noot,

and shut the book, with a glance of general fulmination through his great round spectacles.

The choir, who had been interested spectators of this conflict of lawlessness as personified in the intruder, and authority as in the clerk, rose to their feet as the organ began the *Magnificat*.

The singing-men exchanged glances of amusement, for they were not altogether averse to seeing the clerk worsted. He was an autocrat in his own church, and ruffled them now and again with what they called his bumptiousness. Perhaps he did assume a little as he led the procession, for he forgot at times that he was a peaceable servant of the sanctuary, and fancied, as he marched mace in hand to the music of the organ, that he was a daring officer leading a forlorn hope. That very afternoon he had had a heated discussion in the vestry with Mr Milligan, the bass, on a question of gardening, and the singer, who still smarted under the clerk's overbearing tongue, was glad to emphasise his adversary's defeat by paying attention to the intruder.

The tenor on the cantoris side was taking holiday that day, and Mr Milligan availed himself of the opportunity to offer the absentee's copy of the service to the intruder, who was sitting immediately behind him. He turned round, and placed the book, open at the *Magnificat*, before the stranger with much deference, casting as he faced round again a look of misprision at Janaway, of which the latter was quick to appreciate, the meaning.

This by-play was lost upon the stranger, who nodded his acknowledgment of the civility, and turned to the study of the

score which had been offered him.

Mr Sharnall's resources in the way of men's voices were so limited that he was by no means unused to finding himself short of a voice-part on the one side or the other. He had done his best to remedy the deficiency in the Psalms by supplying the missing part with his left hand, but as he began the *Magnificat* he was amazed to hear a mellow and fairly strong tenor taking part in the service with feeling and precision. It was the stranger who stood in the gap, and when the first surprise was past, the choir welcomed him as being versed in their own arts, and Clerk Janaway forgot the presumption of his entrance and even the rebellious conduct of Mr Milligan. The men and boys sang with new life; they wished, in fact, that so knowledgeable a person should be favourably impressed, and the service was rendered in a more creditable way than Cullerne Church had known for many a long day. Only the stranger was perfectly unmoved. He sang as if he had been a lay-vicar all his life, and when the *Magnificat* was ended, and Mr Sharnall could look through the curtains of the organ-loft, the organist saw him with a Bible devoutly following Mr Noot in the second lesson.

He was a man of forty, rather above the middle height, with dark eyebrows and dark hair, that was beginning to turn grey. His hair, indeed, at once attracted the observer's attention by its thick profusion and natural wavy curl. He was clean-shaven, his features were sharply cut without being thin, and there was something contemptuous about the firm mouth. His nose was

straight, and a powerful face gave the impression of a man who was accustomed to be obeyed. To anyone looking at him from the other side of the choir, he presented a remarkable picture, for which the black oak of Abbot Vinnicomb's stalls supplied a frame. Above his head the canopy went soaring up into crockets and finials, and on the woodwork at the back was painted a shield which nearer inspection would have shown to be the Blandamer cognisance, with its nebuly bars of green and silver. It was, perhaps, so commanding an appearance that made red-haired Patrick Ovens take out an Australian postage-stamp which he had acquired that very day, and point out to the boy next to him the effigy of Queen Victoria sitting crowned in a gothic chair.

The stranger seemed to enter thoroughly into the spirit of the performance; he bore his part in the service bravely, and, being furnished with another book, lent effective aid with the anthem. He stood up decorously as the choir filed out after the Grace, and then sat down again in his seat to listen to the voluntary. Mr Sharnall determined to play something of quality as a tribute to the unknown tenor, and gave as good a rendering of the Saint Anne's fugue as the state of the organ would permit. It was true that the trackers rattled terribly, and that a cipher marred the effect of the second subject; but when he got to the bottom of the little winding stairs that led down from the loft, he found the stranger waiting with a compliment.

"Thank you very much," he said; "it is very kind of you to give us so fine a fugue. It is many years since I was last in this church,

and I am fortunate to have chosen so sunny an afternoon, and to have been in time for your service."

"Not at all, not at all," said the organist; "it is we who are fortunate in having you to help us. You read well, and have a useful voice, though I caught you tripping a little in the lead of the *Nunc Dimittis* Gloria." And he sung it over by way of reminder. "You understand church music, and have sung many a service before, I am sure, though you don't look much given that way," he added, scanning him up and down.

The stranger was amused rather than offended at these blunt criticisms, and the catechising went on.

"Are you stopping in Cullerne?"

"No," the other replied courteously; "I am only here for the day, but I hope I may find other occasions to visit the place and to hear your service. You will have your full complement of voices next time I come, no doubt, and I shall be able to listen more at my ease than to-day?"

"Oh no, you won't. It's ten to one you will find us still worse off. We are a poverty-stricken lot, and no one to come over into Macedonia to help us. These cursed priests eat up our substance like canker-worms, and grow sleek on the money that was left to keep the music going. I don't mean the old woman that read this afternoon; he's got *his* nose on the grindstone like the rest of us —poor Noot! He has to put brown paper in his boots because he can't afford to have them resoled. No, it's the Barabbas in the rectory-house, that buys his stocks and shares, and starves the

service."

This tirade fell lightly on the stranger's ears. He looked as if his thoughts were a thousand miles away, and the organist broke off:

"Do you play the organ? Do you understand an organ?" he asked quickly.

"Alas! I do not play," the stranger said, bringing his mind back with a jerk for the answer, "and understand little about the instrument."

"Well, next time you are here come up into the loft, and I will show you what a chest of rattletraps I have to work with. We are lucky to get through a service without a breakdown; the pedal-board is too short and past its work, and now the bellows are worn-out."

"Surely you can get that altered," the stranger said; "the bellows shouldn't cost so much to mend."

"They are patched already past mending. Those who would like to pay for new ones haven't got the money, and those who have the money won't pay. Why, that very stall you sat in belongs to a man who could give us new bellows, and a new organ, and a new church, if we wanted it. Blandamer, that's his name—Lord Blandamer. If you had looked, you could have seen his great coat of arms on the back of the seat; and he won't spend a halfpenny to keep the roofs from falling on our heads."

"Ah," said the stranger, "it seems a very sad case." They had reached the north door, and, as they stepped out, he repeated

meditatively: “It seems a very sad case; you must tell me more about it next time we meet.”

The organist took the hint, and wished his companion good-afternoon, turning down towards the wharves for a constitutional on the riverside. The stranger raised his hat with something of foreign courtesy, and walked back into the town.

# Chapter Seven

Miss Euphemia Joliffe devoted Saturday afternoons to Saint Sepulchre's Dorcas Society. The meetings were held in a classroom of the Girls' National School, and there a band of devoted females gathered week by week to make garments for the poor. If there was in Cullerne some threadbare gentility, and a great deal of middle-class struggling, there was happily little actual poverty, as it is understood in great towns. Thus the poor, to whom the clothes made by the Dorcas Society were ultimately distributed, could sometimes afford to look the gift-horse in the mouth, and to lament that good material had been marred in the making. "They wept," the organist said, "when they showed the coats and garments that Dorcas made, because they were so badly cut;" but this was a libel, for there were many excellent needlewomen in the society, and among the very best was Miss Euphemia Joliffe.

She was a staunch supporter of the church, and, had her circumstances permitted, would have been a Scripture-reader or at least a district visitor. But the world was so much with her, in the shape of domestic necessities at Bellevue Lodge, as to render parish work impossible, and so the Dorcas meeting was the only systematic philanthropy in which she could venture to indulge. But in the discharge of this duty she was regularity personified; neither wind nor rain, snow nor heat, sickness nor amusement, stopped her, and she was to be found each and every Saturday

afternoon, from three to five, in the National School.

If the Dorcas Society was a duty for the little old lady, it was also a pleasure—one of her few pleasures, and perhaps the greatest. She liked the meetings, because on such occasions she felt herself to be the equal of her more prosperous neighbours. It is the same feeling that makes the half-witted attend funerals and church services. At such times they feel themselves to be for once on an equal footing with their fellow-men: all are reduced to the same level; there are no speeches to be made, no accounts to be added up, no counsels to be given, no decisions to be taken; all are as fools in the sight of God.

At the Dorcas meeting Miss Joliffe wore her "best things" with the exception only of head-gear, for the wearing of her best bonnet was a crowning grace reserved exclusively for the Sabbath. Her wardrobe was too straightened to allow her "best" to follow the shifting seasons closely. If it was bought as best for winter, it might have to play the same rôle also in summer, and thus it fell sometimes to her lot to wear alpaca in December, or, as on this day, to be adorned with a fur necklet when the weather asked for muslin. Yet "in her best" she always felt "fit to be seen"; and when it came to cutting out, or sewing, there were none that excelled her.

Most of the members greeted her with a kind word, for even in a place where envy, hatred and malice walked the streets arm in arm from sunrise to sunset, Miss Euphemia had few enemies. Lying and slandering, and speaking evil of their fellows,

formed a staple occupation of the ladies of Cullerne, as of many another small town; and to Miss Joliffe, who was foolish and old-fashioned enough to think evil of no one, it had seemed at first the only drawback of these delightful meetings that a great deal of such highly-spiced talk was to be heard at them. But even this fly was afterwards removed from the amber; for Mrs Bulteel —the brewer's lady—who wore London dresses, and was much the most fashionable person in Cullerne, proposed that some edifying book should be read aloud on Dorcas afternoons to the assembled workers. It was true that Mrs Flint said she only did so because she thought she had a fine voice; but however that might be, she proposed it, and no one cared to run counter to her. So Mrs Bulteel read properly religious stories, of so touching a nature that an afternoon seldom passed without her being herself dissolved in tears, and evoking sympathetic sniffs and sobs from such as wished to stand in her good books. If Miss Joliffe was not herself so easily moved by imaginary sorrow, she set it down to some lack of loving-kindness in her own disposition, and mentally congratulated the others on their superior sensitiveness.

Miss Joliffe was at the Dorcas meeting, Mr Sharnall was walking by the riverside, Mr Westray was with the masons on the roof of the transept; only Anastasia Joliffe was at Bellevue Lodge when the front-door-bell rang. When her aunt was at home, Anastasia was not allowed to "wait on the gentlemen," nor to answer the bell; but her aunt being absent, and there being no one else in the house, she duly opened one leaf of the great front-

door, and found a gentleman standing on the semicircular flight of steps outside. That he was a gentleman she knew at a glance, for she had a *flair*

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.