HUGH WALPOLE

THE CATHEDRAL

Hugh Walpole

The Cathedral

A Novel

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Adam Brandon was born at Little Empton in Kent in 1839. He was educated at the King's School, Canterbury, and at Pembroke College, Cambridge. Ordained in 1863, he was first curate at St. Martin's, Portsmouth, then Chaplain to the Bishop of Worcester; in the year 1875 he accepted the living of Pomfret in Wiltshire and was there for twelve years. It was in 1887 that he came to our town; he was first Canon and afterwards Archdeacon. Ten years later he had, by personal influence and strength of character, acquired so striking a position amongst us that he was often alluded to as "the King of Polchester." His power was the greater because both our Bishop (Bishop Purcell) and our Dean (Dean Sampson) during that period were men of retiring habits of life. A better man, a greater saint than Bishop Purcell has never lived, but in 1896 he was eighty-six years of age and preferred study and the sanctity of his wonderful library at Carpledon to the publicity and turmoil of a public career; Dean Sampson, gentle and amiable as he was, was not intended by nature for a moulder of men. He was, however, one of the best botanists in the County and his little book on "Glebshire Ferns" is, I believe, an authority in its own line.

Archdeacon Brandon was, of course, greatly helped by his magnificent physical presence. "Magnificent" is not, I

think, too strong a word. Six feet two or three in height, he had the figure of an athlete, light blue eyes, and his hair was still, when he was fifty-eight years of age, thick and fair and curly like that of a boy. He looked, indeed, marvellously young, and his energy and grace of movement might indeed have belonged to a youth still in his teens. It is not difficult to imagine how startling an effect his first appearance in Polchester created. Many of the Polchester ladies thought that he was like "a Greek God" (the fact that they had never seen one gave them the greater confidence), and Miss Dobell, who was the best read of all the ladies in our town, called him "the Viking." This stuck to him, being an easy and emphatic word and pleasantly cultured.

Indeed, had Brandon come to Polchester as a single man there might have been many broken hearts; however, in 1875 he had married Amy Broughton, then a young girl of twenty. He had by her two children, a boy, Falcon, now twenty-one years of age, and a girl, Joan, just eighteen. Brandon therefore was safe from the feminine Polchester world; our town is famous among Cathedral cities for the morality of its upper classes.

It would not have been possible during all these years for Brandon to have remained unconscious of the remarkable splendour of his good looks. He was very well aware of it, but any one who called him conceited (and every one has his enemies) did him a grave injustice. He was not conceited at all-- he simply regarded himself as a completely exceptional person. He was not elated that he was exceptional, he did not flatter himself because it was so; God had seen fit (in a moment of boredom, perhaps, at the

number of insignificant and misshaped human beings He was forced to create) to fling into the world, for once, a truly Fine Specimen, Fine in Body, Fine in Soul, Fine in Intellect. Brandon had none of the sublime egoism of Sir Willoughby Patterne--he thought of others and was kindly and often unselfish--but he did, like Sir Willoughby, believe himself to be of quite another clay from the rest of mankind. He was intended to rule, God had put him into the world for that purpose, and rule he would--to the glory of God and a little, if it must be so, to the glory of himself. He was a very simple person, as indeed were most of the men and women in the Polchester of 1897. He did not analyse motives, whether his own or any one else's; he was aware that he had "weaknesses" (his ungovernable temper was a source of real distress to him at times--at other times he felt that it had its uses). On the whole, however, he was satisfied with himself, his appearance, his abilities, his wife, his family, and, above all, his position in Polchester. This last was very splendid.

His position in the Cathedral, in the Precincts, in the Chapter, in the Town, was unshakable.

He trusted in God, of course, but, like a wise man, he trusted also in himself.

It happened that on a certain wild and stormy afternoon in October 1896 Brandon was filled with a great exultation. As he stood, for a moment, at the door of his house in the Precincts before crossing the Green to the Cathedral, he looked up at the sky obscured with flying wrack of cloud, felt the rain drive across his face, heard the elms in the neighbouring garden creaking and groaning, saw the lights

of the town far beneath the low wall that bounded the Precincts sway and blink in the storm, his heart beat with such pride and happiness that it threatened to burst the body that contained it. There had not been, perhaps, that day anything especially magnificent to elate him; he had won, at the Chapter Meeting that morning, a cheap and easy victory over Canon Foster, the only Canon in Polchester who still showed, at times, a wretched pugnacious resistance to his opinion; he had met Mrs. Combermere afterwards in the High Street and, on the strength of his Chapter victory, had dealt with her haughtily; he had received an especially kind note from Lady St. Leath asking him to dinner early next month; but all these events were of too usual a nature to excite his triumph.

No, there had descended upon him this afternoon that especial ecstasy that is surrendered once and again by the gods to men to lead them, maybe, into some especial blunder or to sharpen, for Olympian humour, the contrast of some swiftly approaching anguish.

Brandon stood for a moment, his head raised, his chest out, his soul in flight, feeling the sharp sting of the raindrops upon his cheek; then, with a little breath of pleasure and happiness, he crossed the Green to the little dark door of Saint Margaret's Chapel.

The Cathedral hung over him, as he stood, feeling in his pocket for his key, a huge black shadow, vast indeed to-day, as it mingled with the grey sky and seemed to be taking part in the directing of the wildness of the storm. Two little gargoyles, perched on the porch of Saint Margaret's door, leered down upon the Archdeacon. The rain trickled down

over their naked twisted bodies, running in rivulets behind their outstanding ears, lodging for a moment on the projection of their hideous nether lips. They grinned down upon the Archdeacon, amused that he should have difficulty, there in the rain, in finding his key. "Pah!" they heard him mutter, and then, perhaps, something worse. The key was found, and he had then to bend his great height to squeeze through the little door. Once inside, he was at the corner of the Saint Margaret Chapel and could see, in the faint half-light, the rosy colours of the beautiful Saint Margaret window that glimmered ever so dimly upon the rows of cane-bottomed chairs, the dingy red hassocks, and the brass tablets upon the grey stone walls. He walked through, picking his way carefully in the dusk, saw for an instant the high, vast expanse of the nave with its few twinkling lights that blew in the windy air, then turned to the left into the Vestry, closing the door behind him. Even as he closed the door he could hear high, high up above him the ringing of the bell for Evensong.

In the Vestry he found Canon Dobell and Canon Rogers. Dobell, the Minor Canon who was singing the service, was a short, round, chubby clergyman, thirty-eight years of age, whose great aim in life was to have an easy time and agree with every one. He lived with a sister in a little house in the Precincts and gave excellent dinners. Very different was Canon Rogers, a thin esthetic man with black bushy eyebrows, a slight stoop and thin brown hair. He took life with grim seriousness. He was a stupid man but obstinate, dogmatic, and given to the condemnation of his fellow-men. He hated innovations as strongly as the Archdeacon himself,

but with his clinging to old forms and rituals there went no self-exaltation. He was a cold-blooded man, although his obstinacy seemed sometimes to point to a fiery fanaticism. But he was not a fanatic any more than a mule is one when he plants his feet four-square and refuses to go forward. No compliments nor threats could move him; he would have lived, had he had a spark of asceticism, a hermit far from the haunts of men, but even that withdrawal would have implied devotion. He was devoted to no one, to no cause, to no religion, to no ambition. He spent his days in maintaining things as they were, not because he loved them, simply because he was obstinate. Brandon quite frankly hated him.

In the farther room the choir-boys were standing in their surplices, whispering and giggling. The sound of the bell was suddenly emphatic. Canon Rogers stood, his hands folded motionless, gazing in front of him. Dobell, smiling so that a dimple appeared in each cheek, said in his chuckling whisper to Brandon:

"Ronder comes to-day, doesn't he?"

"Ronder?" Brandon repeated, coming abruptly out of his secret exultation.

"Yes...Hart-Smith's successor."

"Oh, yes--I believe he does...."

Cobbett, the Verger, with his gold staff, appeared in the Vestry door. A tall handsome man, he had been in the service of the Cathedral as man and boy for fifty years. He had his private ambitions, the main one being that old Lawrence, the head Verger, in his opinion a silly old fool, should die and permit his own legitimate succession. Another ambition was that he should save enough money to

buy another three cottages down in Seatown. He owned already six there. But no one observing his magnificent impassivity (he was famous for this throughout ecclesiastical Glebeshire) would have supposed that he had any thought other than those connected with ceremony. As he appeared the organ began its voluntary, the music stealing through the thick grey walls, creeping past the stout grey pillars that had listened, with so impervious an immobility, to an endless succession of voluntaries. The Archdeacon prayed, the choir responded with a long Amen, and the procession filed out, the boys with faces pious and wistful, the choir-men moving with nonchalance, their restless eyes wandering over the scene so absolutely known to them. Then came Rogers like a martyr; Dobell gaily as though he were enjoying some little joke of his own; last of all, Brandon, superb in carriage, in dignity, in his magnificent recognition of the value of ceremony.

Because to-day was simply an ordinary afternoon with an ordinary Anthem and an ordinary service (Martin in F) the congregation was small, the gates of the great screen closed with a clang behind the choir, and the nave, purple grey under the soft light of the candle-lit choir, was shut out into twilight. In the high carved seats behind and beyond the choir the congregation was sitting; Miss Dobell, who never missed a service that her brother was singing, with her pinched white face and funny old- fashioned bonnet, lost between the huge arms of her seat; Mrs. Combermere, with a friend, stiff and majestic; Mrs. Cole and her sister-in-law, Amy Cole; a few tourists; a man or two; Major Drake, who liked to join in the psalms with his deep bass; and little Mr.

Thompson, one of the masters at the School who loved music and always came to Evensong when he could.

There they were then, and the Archdeacon, looking at them from his stall, could not but feel that they were rather a poor lot. Not that he exactly despised them; he felt kindly towards them and would have done no single one of them an injury, but he knew them all so well--Mrs. Combermere, Miss Dobell, Mrs. Cole, Drake, Thompson. They were shadows before him. If he looked hard at them, they seemed to disappear....

The exultation that he had felt as he stood outside his house-door increased with every moment that passed. It was strange, but he had never, perhaps, in all his life been so happy as he was at that hour. He was driven by the sense of it to that, with him, rarest of all things, introspection. Why should he feel like this? Why did his heart beat thickly, why were his cheeks flushed with a triumphant heat? It could not but be that he was realising to-day how everything was well with him. And why should he not realise it? Looking up to the high vaulted roofs above him, he greeted God, greeted Him as an equal, and thanked Him as a fellow- companion who had helped him through a difficult and dusty journey. He thanked Him for his health, for his bodily vigour and strength, for his beauty, for his good brain, for his successful married life, for his wife (poor Amy), for his house and furniture, for his garden and tennis-lawn, for his carriage and horses, for his son, for his position in the town, his dominance in the Chapter, his authority on the School Council, his importance in the district.... For all these things

he thanked God, and he greeted Him with an outstretched hand.

"As one power to another," his soul cried, "greetings! You have been a true and loyal friend to me. Anything that I can do for You I will do...."

The time came for him to read the First Lesson. He crossed to the Lectern and was conscious that the tourists were whispering together about him. He read aloud, in his splendid voice, something about battles and vengeance, plagues and punishment, God's anger and the trembling Israelites. He might himself have been an avenging God as he read. He was uplifted with the glory of power and the exultation of personal dominion...

He crossed back to his seat, and, as they began the "Magnificat," his eye alighted on the tomb of the Black Bishop. In the volume on Polchester in Chimes' Cathedral Series (4th edition, 1910), page 52, you will find this description of the Black Bishop's Tomb: "It stands between the pillars at the far east end of the choir in the eighth bay from the choir screen. The stone screen which surrounds the tomb is of most elaborate workmanship, and it has, in certain lights, the effect of delicate lace; the canopy over the tomb has pinnacles which rise high above the level of the choir- stalls. The tomb itself is made from a solid block of a dark blue stone. The figure of the bishop, carved in black marble, lies with his hands folded across his breast, clothed in his Episcopal robes and mitre, and crozier on his shoulder. At his feet are a vizor and a pair of gauntlets, these also carved in black marble. On one finger of his right hand is a ring carved from some green stone. His head is

raised by angels and at his feet beyond the vizor and gauntlets are tiny figures of four knights fully armed. A small arcade runs round the tomb with a series of shields in the spaces, and these shields have his motto, 'God giveth Strength,' and the arms of the See of Polchester. His epitaph in brass round the edge of the tomb has thus been translated:

"'Here, having surrendered himself back to God, lies Henry of Arden. His life, which was distinguished for its great piety, its unfailing generosity, its noble statesmanship, was rudely taken in the nave of this Cathedral by men who feared neither the punishment of their fellows nor the just vengeance of an irate God.

"'He died, bravely defending this great house of Prayer, and is now, in eternal happiness, fulfilling the reward of all good and faithful servants, at his Master's side.'"

It has been often remarked by visitors to the Cathedral how curiously this tomb catches light from all sides of the building, but this is undoubtedly in the main due to the fact that the blue stone of which it is chiefly composed responds immediately to the purple and violet lights that fall from the great East window. On a summer day the blue of the tomb seems almost opaque as though it were made of blue glass, and the gilt on the background of the screen and the brasses of the groins glitter and sparkle like fire.

Brandon to-day, wrapped in his strange mood of almost mystical triumph, felt as though he were, indeed, a reincarnation of the great Bishop.

As the "Magnificat" proceeded, he seemed to enter into the very tomb and share in the Bishop's dust. "I stood

beside you," he might almost have cried, "when in the last savage encounter you faced them on the very steps of the altar, striking down two of them with your fists, falling at last, bleeding from a hundred wounds, but crying at the very end, 'God is my right!'"

As he stared across at the tomb, he seemed to see the great figure, deserted by all his terrified adherents, lying in his blood in the now deserted Cathedral; he saw the coloured dusk creep forward and cover him. And then, in the darkness of the night, the two faithful servants who crept in and carried away his body to keep it in safety until his day should come again.

Born in 1100, Henry of Arden had been the first Bishop to give Polchester dignity and power. What William of Wykeham was to Winchester, that Henry of Arden was to the See of Polchester. Through all the wild days of the quarrel between Stephen and Matilda he had stood triumphant, yielding at last only to the mad overwhelming attacks of his private enemies. Of those he had had many. It had been said of him that "he thought himself God--the proudest prelate on earth." Proud he may have been, but he had loved his Bishopric. It was in his time that the Saint Margaret's Chapel had been built, through his energy that the two great Western Towers had risen, because of him that Polchester now could boast one of the richest revenues of any Cathedral in Europe. Men said that he had plundered, stolen the land of powerless men, himself headed forays against neighbouring villages and even castles. He had done it for the greater glory of God. They had been troublous times. It had been every man for himself....

He had told his people that he was God's chief servant; it was even said that he had once, in the plenitude of his power, cried that he was God Himself....

His figure remained to this very day dominating Polchester, vast in stature, black-bearded, rejoicing in his physical strength. He could kill, they used to say, an ox with his fist....

The "Gloria" rang triumphantly up into the shadows of the nave. Brandon moved once more across to the Lectern. He read of the casting of the money-changers out of the Temple.

His voice quivered with pride and exultation so that Cobbett, who had acquired, after many years' practice, the gift of sleeping during the Lessons and Sermon with his eyes open, woke up with a start and wondered what was the matter.

Brandon's mood, when he was back in his own drawing-room, did not leave him; it was rather intensified by the cosiness and security of his home. Lying back in his large arm-chair in front of the fire, his long legs stretched out before him, he could hear the rain beating on the window-panes and beyond that the murmur of the organ (Brockett, the organist, was practising, as he often did after Evensong).

The drawing-room was a long narrow one with many windows; it was furnished in excellent taste. The carpet and the curtains and the dark blue coverings to the chairs were all a little faded, but this only gave them an additional dignity and repose. There were two large portraits of himself and Mrs. Brandon painted at the time of their marriage,

some low white book-shelves, a large copy of "Christ in the Temple"--plenty of space, flowers, light.

Mrs. Brandon was, at this time, a woman of forty-two, but she looked very much less than that. She was slight, dark, pale, quite undistinguished. She had large grey eyes that looked on to the ground when you spoke to her. She was considered a very shy woman, negative in every way. She agreed with everything that was said to her and seemed to have no opinions of her own. She was simply "the wife of the Archdeacon." Mrs. Combermere considered her a "poor little fool." She had no real friends in Polchester, and it made little difference to any gathering whether she were there or not. She had been only once known to lose her temper in public--once in the market-place she had seen a farmer beat his horse over the eyes. She had actually gone up to him and struck him. Afterwards she had said that "she did not like to see animals ill-treated." The Archdeacon had apologised for her, and no more had been said about it. The farmer had borne her no grudge.

She sat now at the little tea-table, her eyes screwed up over the serious question of giving the Archdeacon his tea exactly as he wanted it. Her whole mind was apparently engaged on this problem, and the Archdeacon did not care to-day that she did not answer his questions and support his comments because he was very, very happy, the whole of his being thrilling with security and success and innocent pride.

Joan Brandon came in. In appearance she was, as Mrs. Sampson said, "insignificant." You would not look at her twice any more than you would have looked at her mother

twice. Her figure was slight and her legs (she was wearing long skirts this year for the first time) too long. Her hair was dark brown and her eyes dark brown. She had nice rosy cheeks, but they were inclined to freckle. She smiled a good deal and laughed, when in company, more noisily than was proper. "A bit of a tomboy, I'm afraid," was what one used to hear about her. But she was not really a tomboy; she moved quietly, and her own bedroom was always neat and tidy. She had very little pocket-money and only seldom new clothes, not because the Archdeacon was mean, but because Joan was so often forgotten and left out of the scheme of things. It was surprising that the only girl in the house should be so often forgotten, but the Archdeacon did not care for girls, and Mrs. Brandon did not appear to think very often of any one except the Archdeacon. Falk, Joan's brother, now at Oxford, when he was at home had other things to do than consider Joan. She had gone, ever since she was twelve, to the Polchester High School for Girls, and there she was popular, and might have made many friends, had it not been that she could not invite her companions to her home. Her father did not like "noise in the house." She had been Captain of the Hockey team; the small girls in the school had all adored her. She had left the place six months ago and had come home to "help her mother." She had had, in honest fact, six months' loneliness, although no one knew that except herself. Her mother had not wanted her help. There had been nothing for her to do, and she had felt herself too young to venture into the company of older girls in the town. She had been rather "blue" and had looked back on Seafield House, the High School, with longing, and

then suddenly, one morning, for no very clear reason she had taken a new view of life. Everything seemed delightful and even thrilling, commonplace things that she had known all her days, the High Street, keeping her rooms tidy, spending or saving the minute monthly allowance, the Cathedral, the river. She was all in a moment aware that something very delightful would shortly occur. What it was she did not know, and she laughed at herself for imagining that anything extraordinary could ever happen to any one so commonplace as herself, but there the strange feeling was and it would not go away.

To-day, as always when her father was there, she came in very quietly, sat down near her mother, saw that she made no sort of interruption to the Archdeacon's flow of conversation. She found that he was in a good humour to-day, and she was glad of that because it would please her mother. She herself had a great interest in all that he said. She thought him a most wonderful man, and secretly was swollen with pride that she was his daughter. It did not hurt her at all that he never took any notice of her. Why should he? Nor did she ever feel jealous of Falk, her father's favourite. That seemed to her quite natural. She had the idea, now most thoroughly exploded but then universally held in Polchester, that women were greatly inferior to men. She did not read the more advanced novels written by Mme. Sarah Grand and Mrs. Lynn Linton. I am ashamed to say that her favourite authors were Miss Alcott and Miss Charlotte Mary Yonge. Moreover, she herself admired Falk extremely. He seemed to her a hero and always right in everything that he did.

Her father continued to talk, and behind the reverberation of his deep voice the roll of the organ like an approving echo could faintly be heard.

"There was a moment when I thought Foster was going to interfere. I've been against the garden-roller from the first--they've got one and what do they want another for? And, anyway, he thinks I meddle with the School's affairs too much. Who wants to meddle with the School's affairs? I'm sure they're nothing but a nuisance, but some one's got to prevent the place from going to wrack and ruin, and if they all leave it to me I can't very well refuse it, can I? Hey?"

"No, dear."

"You see what I mean?"

"Yes, dear."

"Well, then--" (As though Mrs. Brandon had just been overcome in an argument in which she'd shown the greatest obstinacy.) "There you are. It would be false modesty to deny that I've got the Chapter more or less in my pocket And why shouldn't I have? Has any one worked harder for this place and the Cathedral than I have?"

"No, dear."

"Well, then.... There's this new fellow Ronder coming to-day. Don't know much about him, but he won't give much trouble, I expect--trouble in the way of delaying things, I mean. What we want is work done expeditiously. I've just about got that Chapter moving at last. Ten years' hard work. Deserve a V.C. or something. Hey?"

"Yes, dear, I'm sure you do."

The Archdeacon gave one of his well-known roars of laughter--a laugh famous throughout the county, a laugh

described by his admirers as "Homeric," by his enemies as "ear-splitting." There was, however, enemies or no enemies, something sympathetic in that laugh, something boyish and simple and honest.

He suddenly pulled himself up, bringing his long legs close against his broad chest.

"No letter from Falk to-day, was there?"

"No, dear."

"Humph. That's three weeks we haven't heard. Hope there's nothing wrong."

"What could there be wrong, dear?"

"Nothing, of course.... Well, Joan, and what have you been doing with yourself all day?"

It was only in his most happy and resplendent moods that the Archdeacon held jocular conversations with his daughter. These conversations had been, in the past, moments of agony and terror to her, but since that morning when she had suddenly woken to a realisation of the marvellous possibilities in life her terror had left her. There were other people in the world besides her father....

Nevertheless, a little, her agitation was still with her. She looked up at him, smiling.

"Oh, I don't know, father.... I went to the Library this morning to change the books for mother--"

"Novels, I suppose. No one ever reads anything but trash nowadays."

"They hadn't anything that mother put down. They never have. Miss Milton sits on the new novels and keeps them for Mrs. Sampson and Mrs. Combermere."

"Sits on them?"

"Yes--really sits on them. I saw her take one from under her skirt the other day when Mrs. Sampson asked for it. It was one that mother has wanted a long time."

The Archdeacon was angry. "I never heard anything so scandalous. I'll just see to that. What's the use of being on the Library Committee if that kind of thing happens? That woman shall go."

"Oh no! father!..."

"Of course she shall go. I never heard anything so dishonest in my life!..."

Joan remembered that little conversation until the end of her life. And with reason.

The door was flung open. Some one came hurriedly in, then stopped, with a sudden arrested impulse, looking at them. It was Falk.

Falk was a very good-looking man--fair hair, light blue eyes like his father's, slim and straight and quite obviously fearless. It was that quality of courage that struck every one who saw him; it was not only that he feared, it seemed, no one and nothing, but that he went a step further than that, spending his life in defying every one and everything, as a practised dueller might challenge every one he met in order to keep his play in practice. "I don't like young Brandon," Mrs. Sampson said. "He snorts contempt at you...."

He was only twenty-one, a contemptuous age. He looked as though he had been living in that house for weeks, although, as a fact, he had just driven up, after a long and tiresome journey, in an ancient cab through the pouring rain. The Archdeacon gazed at his son in a bewildered, confused amaze, as though he, a convinced sceptic, were

suddenly confronted, in broad daylight, with an undoubted ghost.

"What's the matter?" he said at last. "Why are you here?"

"I've been sent down," said Falk.

It was characteristic of the relationship in that family that, at that statement, Mrs. Brandon and Joan did not look at Falk but at the Archdeacon.

"Sent down!"

"Yes, for ragging! They wanted to do it last term."

"Sent down!" The Archdeacon shot to his feet; his voice suddenly lifted into a cry. "And you have the impertinence to come here and tell me! You walk in as though nothing had happened! You walk in!..."

"You're angry," said Falk, smiling. "Of course I knew you would be. You might hear me out first. But I'll come along when I've unpacked and you're a bit cooler. I wanted some tea, but I suppose that will have to wait. You just listen, father, and you'll find it isn't so bad. Oxford's a rotten place for any one who wants to be on his own, and, anyway, you won't have to pay my bills any more."

Falk turned and went.

The Archdeacon, as he stood there, felt a dim mysterious pain as though an adversary whom he completely despised had found suddenly with his weapon a joint in his armour.

Chapter II

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Ronders

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The train that brought Falk Brandon back to Polchester brought also the Ronders--Frederick Ronder, newly Canon of Polchester, and his aunt, Miss Alice Ronder. About them the station gathered in a black cloud, dirty, obscure, lit by flashes of light and flame, shaken with screams, rumblings, the crashing of carriage against carriage, the rattle of cab-wheels on the cobbles outside. To-day also there was the hiss and scatter of the rain upon the glass roof. The Ronders stood, not bewildered, for that they never were, but thinking what would be best. The new Canon was a round man, round-shouldered, round-faced, round-stomached, round legged. A fair height, he was not ludicrous, but it seemed that if you laid him down he would roll naturally, still smiling, to the farthest end of the station. He wore large, very round spectacles. His black clerical coat and trousers and hat were scrupulously clean and smartly cut. He was not a dandy, but he was not shabby. He smiled a great deal, not nervously as curates are supposed to smile, not effusively, but simply with geniality. His aunt was a contrast, thin, straight, stiff white collar, little black bow-tie, coat like a man's, skirt with no nonsense about it. No nonsense about her anywhere. She was not unamiable, perhaps, but business came first.

"Well, what do we do?" he asked.

"We collect our bags and find the cab," she answered briskly.

They found their bags, and there were a great many of them; Miss Ronder, having seen that they were all there and that there was no nonsense about the porter, moved off to the barrier followed by her nephew.

As they came into the station square, all smelling of hay and the rain, the deluge slowly withdrew its forces, recalling them gradually so that the drops whispered now, patter-patter--pit-pat. A pigeon hovered down and pecked at the cobbles. Faint colour threaded the thick blotting-paper grey.

Old Fawcett himself had come to the station to meet them. Why had he felt it to be an occasion? God only knows. A new Canon was nothing to him. He very seldom now, being over eighty, with a strange "wormy" pain in his left ear, took his horses out himself. He saved his money and counted it over by his fireside to see that his old woman didn't get any of it. He hated his old woman, and in a vaguely superstitious, thoroughly Glebeshire fashion half-believed that she had cast a spell over him and was really responsible for his "wormy" ear.

Why had he come? He didn't himself know. Perhaps Ronder was going to be of importance in the place, he had come from London and they all had money in London. He licked his purple protruding lips greedily as he saw the generous man. Yes, kindly and generous he looked....

They got into the musty cab and rattled away over the cobbles.

"I hope Mrs. Clay got the telegram all right." Miss Ronder's thin bosom was a little agitated beneath its white waistcoat. "You'll never forgive me if things aren't looking as though we'd lived in the place for months."

Alice Ronder was over sixty and as active as a woman of forty. Ronder looked at her and laughed.

"Never forgive you! What words! Do I ever cherish grievances? Never... but I do like to be comfortable."

"Well, everything was all right a week ago. I've slaved at the place, as you know, and Mrs. Clay's a jewel--but she complains of the Polchester maids--says there isn't one that's any good. Oh, I want my tea, I want my tea!"

They were climbing up from the market-place into the High Street. Ronder looked about him with genial curiosity.

"Very nice," he said; "I believe I can be comfortable here."

"If you aren't comfortable you certainly won't stay," she answered him sharply.

"Then I *must* be comfortable," he replied, laughing.

He laughed a great deal, but absent-mindedly, as though his thoughts were elsewhere. It would have been interesting to a student of human nature to have been there and watched him as he sat back in the cab, looking through the window, indeed, but seeing apparently nothing. He seemed to be gazing through his round spectacles very short-sightedly, his eyes screwed up and dim. His fat soft hands were planted solidly on his thick knees.

The observer would have been interested because he would soon have realised that Ronder saw everything; nothing, however insignificant, escaped him, but he seemed

to see with his brain as though he had learnt the trick of forcing it to some new function that did not properly belong to it. The broad white forehead under the soft black clerical hat was smooth, unwrinkled, mild and calm.... He had trained it to be so.

The High Street was like any High Street of a small Cathedral town in the early evening. The pavements were sleek and shiny after the rain; people were walking with the air of being unusually pleased with the world, always the human expression when the storms have withdrawn and there is peace and colour in the sky. There were lights behind the solemn panes of Bennett's the bookseller's, that fine shop whose first master had seen Sir Walter Scott in London and spoken to Byron. In his window were rows of the classics in calf and first editions of the Surtees books and *Dr. Syntax*. At the very top of the High Street was Mellock's the pastry- cook's, gay with its gas, rich with its famous saffron buns, its still more famous ginger-bread cake, and, most famous of all, its lemon biscuits. Even as the Ronders' cab paused for a moment before it turned to pass under the dark Arden Gate on to the asphalt of the Precincts, the great Mrs. Mellock herself, round and rubicund, came to the door and looked about her at the weather. An errand-boy passed, whistling, down the hill, a stiff military-looking gentleman with white moustaches mounted majestically the steps of the Conservative Club; then they rattled under the black archway, echoed for a moment on the noisy cobbles, then slipped into the quiet solemnity of the Precincts asphalt. It was Brandon who had insisted on the asphalt. Old residents

had complained that to take away the cobbles would be to rid the Precincts of all its atmosphere.

"I don't care about atmosphere," said the Archdeacon, "I want to sleep at night."

Very quiet here; not a sound penetrated. The Cathedral was a huge shadow above its darkened lawns; not a human soul was to be seen.

The cab stopped with a jerk at Number Eight. The bell was rung by old Fawcett, who stood on the top step looking down at Ronder and wondering how much he dared to ask him. Ask him too much now and perhaps he would not deal with him in the future. Moreover, although the man wore large spectacles and was fat he was probably not a fool.... Fawcett could not tell why he was so sure, but there was something....

Mrs. Clay was at the door, smiling and ordering a small frightened girl to "hurry up now." Miss Ronder disappeared into the house. Ronder stood for a moment looking about him as though he were a spy in enemy country and must let nothing escape him.

"Whose is that big place there?" he asked Fawcett, pointing to a house that stood by itself at the farther corner of the Precincts.

"Archdeacon Brandon's, sir."

"Oh!..." Ronder mounted the steps. "Good night," he said to Fawcett. "Mrs. Clay, pay the cabman, please."

The Ronders had taken this house a month ago; for two months before that it had stood desolate, wisps of paper and straw blowing about it, its "To let" notice creaking and screaming in every wind. The Hon. Mrs. Pentecoste, an