

**EMMANUEL CHURCH: A
CHAPTER IN THE
ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY
OF THE PRESENT CENTURY**

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Emmanuel Church: A Chapter in the Ecclesiastical History of the Present Century by R. Thomas

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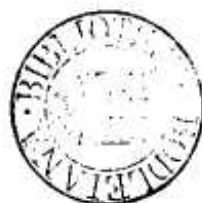
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BY R. THOMAS.



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EMMANUEL CHURCH.

CHAPTER I.

EMMANUEL CHURCH was a somewhat imposing edifice in the main street of a rising town in the south of England.

The town was busy and bustling at the time to which this narrative refers. Not long before, it had suffered considerable depression by reason of the changes in commercial life, which had all but ruined its trade. Men of experience had, however, created a new trade in the immediate neighbourhood, and thousands had been drawn thither from all parts, in the hope of finding that constant employment which should put bread into the mouths of their children, and enable their wives to appear as the wives of respectable artisans should appear—well-dressed and “comfortable looking.”

The chief reviver of the commerce of the district was a man of extraordinary energy and business ingenuity, who, by his ready tact, and good nature, had not only won to himself a large fortune, but had filled the purses of not a few of the local tradesmen, whose only

recognition of the services he had rendered to the locality was expressed in utterances betokening jealousy and envy. So far indeed had this spirit permeated the minds and hearts of many of the tradesmen of the town, that they would have sacrificed a few pounds for well-grounded information that the firm of Mr. Knabbs had been compelled to stop payment. But Mr. Knabbs was very far from insolvent. He was too far-seeing seriously to involve himself. Hence the day of rejoicing on this account never came. The town prospered. Bankruptcies were few and far between; and these were confined to those publicans, who had the idea that man's life consisted mainly in swallowing unmeasured quantities of "home-brewed." Men who had failed in everything else, from making bad laws for a long-suffering nation, down to prize-fighting, found for themselves a place of refuge in the landlordship of the "Red Lion" or "Pig and Whistle," and dragged on their miserable existence until they found relief in a fit of apoplexy, or in an illegitimate use of Sheffield outlery.

But, owing to the revival of trade, men of business were generally "making money." Most of the tradesmen of the place, even in bad years, stood well with their bankers. And although every new inhabitant who aspired to public confidence (by advertising articles "cheap and thoroughly good," "bought in the best markets," &c.) in the shop-keeping line, was regarded with no very marked generosity, yet, on the whole, trade was so generally satisfactory that the busy, bustling town could afford to be careless about the importation of a few "ne'er-do-wells," who, having

failed elsewhere, through defective management, and from other causes, were not very likely to succeed in Grafenburg.

With the augmentation of Mr. Knabbs's business, the prosperity of the town increased. Mr. Williams took out his old-fashioned, well-wooded windows, and put in plate-glass. Mr. Bilbey was not to be outdone, and did the like. Mr. Grossman followed suit. Mr. Jones caught the plate-glass contagion. And, in a few months, the windows of the town from end to end were so improved in appearance, and the articles of drapery, millinery, confectionery, &c., behind them, looked so well pleased with themselves because of the change, that a stranger would have been at a loss to account for the new aspect of things. And, as one new thing always brings on another new thing, the internal aspect of different dwellings was thoroughly changed. Mrs. Williams, with whom the plate-glass mania commenced, was not satisfied that the window alone should testify to her taste in respect to that superior kind of transparency; the mantelpiece of the best room (until now styled the parlour, but henceforth to be dignified by the name of "drawing-room") must witness for her fondness for plate-glass. The old-fashioned mahogany furniture, capable of bearing an Englishman of nineteen stone, without grumbling in its joints, by any perceptible murmur, must be exchanged for a bran new walnut suite. The old-fashioned organ, which stood in Mrs. Williams's best room corner, and which had accompanied many a fervently-sung psalm tune on a Sunday night, had notice to quit, because Mrs. Williams's new Broadwood

was ordered at forty guineas; and so it came to pass that the comfortable old room, on whose broad sofa we had many a time thrown up our weary legs, without the most distant thought of reproof from the mistress of the house, became rehabilitated with a new walnut suite, covered over with cold-looking chintz, from every ugly monstrosity of a flower on which there came forth a hoarse whisper, to the effect that you had better not try to make yourself "comfortable" on it; or you would see an expression on the face of Mrs. Williams which you would rather not see, and which you could not by any effort of ingenuity translate into a smile.

Mrs. Williams (bless her heart!) had been accustomed to say, "Now, then, throw yourself on that sofa. It has borne many a good man before you." And the dear old couch seemed to say in response, "Come on; I'll lull you into repose in a few minutes at the most." Blessings on that old couch! I wonder what unfeeling broker has purchased it. We would possess it if we could, out of gratitude for the many happy hours we have spent on it; when gentle voices soothed us into forgetfulness of life's cares; and happy faces beamed on us, and kindly words brought hope and peace into our breast. It should occupy our favourite room, and, stretched on its broad bed, we would try to recall, again and again, that blissful past which has floated from us and will never return.

Nor did the internal reform of domestic appointments end with Mrs. Williams's "drawing-room." On the Monday of the week next ensuing to that on which the old organ had quitted its corner, never more to soothe us with its "Pastoral Symphony," and other