

**AN ENTHUSIAST;
THREE
VOLUMES; VOL. I**

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An enthusiast; Three volumes; Vol. I by Caroline Fothergill

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CAROLINE FOTHERGILL

**AN ENTHUSIAST;
THREE
VOLUMES; VOL. I**

*never saw
with love from
C. F.*

AN ENTHUSIAST.

BY

CAROLINE FOTHERGILL,

AUTHOR OF

"PUT TO THE PROOF," "THE SECOND BEST," "POES OF A HOUSEHOLD."

"'Tis an awkward thing to play with souls."

R. BROWNING.

THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

London :

WARD AND DOWNEY,

12, YORK STREET, COVENT GARDEN.

1887.

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BOOK I.

STANEDALE.

"The Blossom in the Bud."

NEW YORK
1877

AN ENTHUSIAST.

PROLOGUE.

THE pedestrian who had wandered into the little village church, and, weary after a long walk in the hot sun, had fallen asleep in the cool dimness of the organ-loft, woke suddenly and rubbed his eyes. He was sufficiently awake to be conscious that the words which he heard some one reading in a measured, monotonous voice, were part of the marriage service, but he felt no curiosity about the people who were being married. He did not at any time find villagers very interesting, and now he was still too drowsy to raise his head and look

down into the church. He closed his eyes and dozed off again, still hearing as in a dream the voice of the clergyman, exhorting the man and woman who stood before him. Then the voice ceased, steps came along the aisle, he heard the people go into the vestry, from which they presently came out again and left the church. Once more that unbroken silence prevailed which had reigned when he had first stepped into the building; but it lasted a very short time. Before he fell asleep again he was roused, and this time thoroughly, by a sudden peal of laughter which broke in upon the sleepy stillness of a July morning, which is on the point of merging into afternoon, and rang through the empty old church. It was a girl's laughter,—about that, there could be no mistake,—and whoever she was, she must have been very much amused at something,

for she went on laughing in an uncontrollable, ecstatic manner, which seemed strange amid such surroundings. It was wonderful laughter, so rippling, so melodious, and so full of enjoyment. The man in the organ-loft listened spellbound; he felt that he would never forget that laughter; if he heard it again after twenty years he would recognize it. Moreover, his curiosity was roused at last. It was impossible such laughter as that could come from the throat of a common village girl; he resolved to get up and go and see what had happened. But when he got downstairs, he found the church door was already locked; the sound had come to his ears through the open windows. By the time his knocking and shaking at the door had been heard, and the clerk had come to set him free, his mood had changed, and he was too heated and out of