

**Chronicles of Carlingford**  
**PHOEBE, JUNIOR**

**MRS OLIPHANT**

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# **PHŒBE, JUNIOR.**

**A Last Chronicle of Carlingford.**

## CHAPTER I.

### THE PASTOR'S PROGRESS.

Miss Phœbe Tozer, the only daughter of the chief deacon and leading member of the Dissenting connection in Carlingford, married, shortly after his appointment to the charge of Salem Chapel, in that town, the Reverend Mr. Beecham, one of the most rising young men in the denomination. The marriage was in many ways satisfactory to the young lady's family, for Mr. Beecham was himself the son of respectable people in a good way of business, and not destitute of means; and the position was one which they had always felt most suitable for their daughter, and to which she had been almost, it may be said, brought up. It is, however, scarcely necessary to add that it was not quite so agreeable to the other leading members of the congregation. I should be very sorry to say that each family wished that preferment for its own favourite daughter; for indeed there can be no doubt, as Mrs. Pigeon asserted vigorously, that a substantial grocer, whose father before him had established an excellent business, and who had paid for his pew in Salem as long as any one could recollect, and supported every charity, and paid up on all occasions when extra expense was necessary, was in every way a more desirable son-in-law than a poor minister who was always dependent on pleasing the chapel folks, and might have to turn out any day. Notwithstanding, however, the evident superiority of the establishment thus attained by Maria Pigeon, there is a certain something attached to the position of a clerical caste, even among such an independent body as the congregation at Salem Chapel, which has its own especial charms, and neither the young people who had been her

companions nor the old people who had patronized and snubbed her, felt any satisfaction in seeing Phœbe thus advanced over them to the honours and glories inalienable from the position of minister's wife. All her little airs of bridal vanity were considered as so many offensive manifestations of delight and exultation in her rise in life. Her *trousseau*, though pronounced by all competent judges not half so abundant or fine as Maria Pigeon's, still called forth comments which nobody ventured to indulge in, in respect to the grocer's blooming bride. A grocer's lady has a right to anything her parents can afford; but to see a minister's wife swelling herself up, and trying to ape the quality, filled the town with virtuous indignation. The sight of young Mrs. Beecham walking about with her card-case in her hand, calling on the Miss Hemmingeses, shaking hands with Mrs. Rider the doctor's wife, caused unmitigated disgust throughout all the back streets of Carlingford; and “*that* Phœbe a-sweeping in as if the chapel belonged to her,” was almost more than the oldest sinner could bear. Phœbe, it must be added, felt her elevation to the full, and did not spare her congregation. Sometimes she would have the audacity to walk from the vestry to the pew, as if she were an office-bearer, instead of coming in humbly by the door as became a woman. She would sit still ostentatiously until every one had gone, waiting for her husband. She quite led the singing, everybody remarked, paying no more attention to the choir than if it did not exist; and once she had even paused on her way to her seat, and turned down the gas, which was blazing too high, with an air of proprietorship that nobody could endure.

“Does Salem belong to them Tozers, I should like to know?” said Mrs. Brown. “Brown would never be outdone by him in subscriptions you may be sure, nor Mr. Pigeon neither, if the truth

was known. I never gave my money to build a castle for the Tozers.”

Thus the whole congregation expressed itself with more or less eloquence, and though the attendance never diminished, everybody being too anxious to see “what they would do next,” the feeling could not be ignored. Phœbe herself, with a courage which developed from the moment of her marriage, took the initiative.

“It never answers,” she said, solemnly, “to marry one of the flock; I knew it, Henery, and I told you so; and if you would be so infatuated, and marry me when I told you not, for your own interests—”

“They're all jealous of you, my pet, that's what it is,” said Mr. Beecham, and laughed. He could bear the annoyance in consideration of that sweet consciousness of its cause which stole over all his being. Phœbe laughed, too, but not with so delicious a gratification. She felt that there were people, even in Salem, who might be jealous of him.

“The end of it all is, we must not stay here,” she said. “You must find another sphere for your talents, Henery, and I'm sure it will not be difficult. If you get put on that deputation that is going down to the North, suppose you take a few of your best sermons, dear. That can never do any harm—indeed it's sure to do good, to some poor benighted soul at least, that perhaps never heard the truth before. And likewise, perhaps, to some vacant congregation. I have always heard that chapels in the North were very superior to here. A different class of society, and better altogether. These Pigeons and Browns, and people are not the sort of society for you.”



“Well, there's truth in that,” said Mr. Beecham, pulling up his shirt-collar. “Certainly it isn't the sort of thing one was accustomed to.” And he lent a serious ear to the suggestion about the sermons. The consequence was that an invitation followed from a chapel in the North, where indeed Mrs. Phœbe found herself in much finer society, and grew rapidly in importance and in ideas. After this favourable start, the process went on for many years by which a young man from Homerton was then developed into the influential and highly esteemed pastor of an important flock. Things may be, and probably are, differently managed now-a-days. Mr. Beecham had unbounded fluency and an unctuous manner of treating his subjects. It was eloquence of a kind, though not of an elevated kind. Never to be at a loss for what you have to say is a prodigious advantage to all men in all positions, but doubly so to a popular minister. He had an unbounded wealth of phraseology. Sentences seemed to melt out of his mouth without any apparent effort, all set in a certain cadence. He had not, perhaps, much power of thought, but it is easy to make up for such a secondary want when the gift of expression is so strong. Mr. Beecham rose, like an actor, from a long and successful career in the provinces, to what might be called the Surrey side of congregational eminence in London; and from thence attained his final apotheosis in a handsome chapel near Regent's Park, built of the whitest stone, and cushioned with the reddest damask, where a very large congregation sat in great comfort and listened to his sermons with a satisfaction no doubt increased by the fact that the cushions were soft as their own easy-chairs, and that carpets and hot-water pipes kept everything snug under foot.

It was the most comfortable chapel in the whole connection. The seats were arranged like those of an amphitheatre, each line on a

slightly higher level than the one in front of it, so that everybody saw everything that was going on. No dimness or mystery was wanted there; everything was bright daylight, bright paint, red cushions, comfort and respectability. It might not be a place very well adapted for saying your prayers in, but then you could say your prayers at home—and it was a place admirably adapted for hearing sermons in, which you could not do at home; and all the arrangements were such that you could hear in the greatest comfort, not to say luxury. I wonder, for my own part, that the poor folk about did not seize upon the Crescent Chapel on the cold Sunday mornings, and make themselves happy in those warm and ruddy pews. It would be a little amusing to speculate what all the well-dressed pew-holders would have done had this unexpected answer to the appeal which Mr. Beecham believed himself to make every Sunday to the world in general, been literally given. It would have been extremely embarrassing to the Managing Committee and all the office-bearers, and would have, I fear, deeply exasperated and offended the occupants of those family pews; but fortunately this difficulty never did occur. The proletariat of Marylebone had not the sense or the courage, or the profanity, which you will, to hit upon this mode of warming themselves. The real congregation embraced none of the unwashed multitude. Its value in mere velvet, silk, lace, trinkets, and furs was something amazing, and the amount these comfortable people represented in the way of income would have amounted to a most princely revenue. The little Salems and Bethesdas, with their humble flocks, could not be supposed to belong to the same species; and the difference was almost equally marked between such a place of worship as the Crescent Chapel and the parish churches, which are like the nets in the Gospel, and take in all kinds of fish, bad and good. The pew-holders in the Crescent Chapel were universally well off; they subscribed

liberally to missionary societies, far more liberally than the people in St. Paul's close by did to the S. P. G. They had everything of the best in the chapel, as they had in their houses. They no more economized on their minister than they did on their pew-cushions, and they spent an amount of money on their choir which made the singing-people at St. Paul's gnash their teeth. From all this it will be seen that the atmosphere of the Crescent Chapel was of a very distinct and individual kind. It was a warm, luxurious air, perfumy, breathing of that refinement which is possible to mere wealth. I do not say there might not be true refinement besides, but the surface kind, that which you buy from upholsterers and tailors and dressmakers, which you procure ready made at schools, and which can only be kept up at a very high cost, abounded and pervaded the place. Badly dressed people felt themselves out of place in that brilliant sanctuary; a muddy footprint upon the thick matting in the passages was looked at as a crime. Clean dry feet issuing out of carriage or cab kept the aisles unstained, even on the wettest day. We say cab, because many of the people who went to the Crescent Chapel objected to take out their own carriages or work their own horses on Sunday; and there were many more who, though they did not possess carriages, used cabs with a freedom incompatible with poverty. As a general rule, they were much better off than the people at St. Paul's, more universally prosperous and well-to-do. And they were at the same time what you might safely call well-informed people—people who read the newspapers, and sometimes the magazines, and knew what was going on. The men were almost all liberal in politics, and believed in Mr. Gladstone with enthusiasm; the women often “took an interest” in public movements, especially of a charitable character. There was less mental stagnation among them probably than among many of their neighbours. Their life was not profound nor high, but still it was

life after a sort. Such was the flock which had invited Mr. Beecham to become their pastor when he reached the climax of his career. They gave him a very good salary, enough to enable him to have a handsome house in one of the terraces overlooking Regent's Park. It is not a fashionable quarter, but it is not to be despised in any way. The rooms were good-sized and lofty, and sometimes have been known to suffice for very fine people indeed, a fact which the Beechams were well aware of; and they were not above the amiable weakness of making it known that their house was in a line with that of Lady Cecilia Burleigh. This single fact of itself might suffice to mark the incalculable distance between the Reverend Mr. Beecham of the Crescent Chapel, and the young man who began life as minister of Salem in Carlingford. And the development outside was not less remarkable than the development within.

It is astonishing how our prejudices change from youth to middle age, even without any remarkable interposition of fortune; I do not say dissipate, or even dispel, which is much more doubtful—but they change. When Mr. and Mrs. Beecham commenced life, they had both the warmest feeling of opposition to the Church and everything churchy. All the circumstances of their lives had encouraged this feeling. The dislike of the little for the great, the instinctive opposition of a lower class towards the higher, intensified that natural essence of separatism, that determination to be wiser than one's neighbour, which in the common mind lies at the bottom of all dissent. In saying this we no more accuse Dissenters in religion than Dissenters in politics, or in art, or in criticism. The first dissenter in most cases is an original thinker, to whom his enforced departure from the ways of his fathers is misery and pain. Generally he has a hard struggle with himself

before he can give up, for the superlative truth which has taken possession of him, all the habits, the pious traditions of his life. He is the real Nonconformist—half martyr, half victim, of his convictions. But that Nonconformity which has come to be the faith in which a large number of people are trained is a totally different business, and affects a very different kind of sentiments. Personal and independent conviction has no more to do with it than it has to do with the ardour of a Breton peasant trained in deepest zeal of Romanism, or the unbounded certainty of any other traditionary believer. For this reason we may be allowed to discuss the changes of feeling which manifested themselves in Mr. and Mrs. Beecham without anything disrespectful to Nonconformity. Not being persons of original mind, they were what their training and circumstances, and a flood of natural influences, made them. They began life, feeling themselves to be of a hopelessly low social caste, and believing themselves to be superior to their superiors in that enlightenment which they had been brought up to believe distinguished the connection. The first thing which opened their minds to a dawning doubt whether their enlightenment was, in reality, so much greater than that of their neighbours, was the social change worked in their position by their removal from Carlingford. In the great towns of the North, Dissent attains its highest social elevation, and Chapel people are no longer to be distinguished from Church people except by the fact that they go to Chapel instead of Church, a definition so simple as to be quite overwhelming to the unprepared dissenting intelligence, brought up in a little Tory borough, still holding for Church and Queen. The amazing difference which this made in the sentiments of Mrs. Phœbe Beecham, *née* Tozer, it is quite impossible to describe. Her sudden introduction to “circles” which Mrs. Pigeon had never entered, and to houses at the area-door of which Mr. Brown, the

dairyman, would have humbly waited, would have turned the young woman's head, had she not felt the overpowering necessity of keeping that organ as steady as possible, to help her to hold her position in the new world. Phœbe was a girl of spirit, and though her head went round and round, and everything felt confused about her, she did manage desperately to hold her own and to avoid committing herself; but I cannot attempt to tell how much her social elevation modified her sectarian zeal. Phœbe was only a woman, so that I am free to assign such motives as having a serious power over her. Let us hope Mr. Beecham, being a man and a pastor, was moved in a more lofty, intellectual, and spiritual way.

But however that may be, the pair went conjugally together in this modification of sentiment, and by the time they reached the lofty eminence of the Crescent Chapel, were as liberal-minded Nonconformists as heart could desire. Mr. Beecham indeed had many friends in the Low, and even some in the Broad Church. He appeared on platforms, to promote various public movements, along with clergymen of the Church. He spoke of "our brethren within the pale of the Establishment" always with respect, sometimes even with enthusiasm. "Depend upon it, my dear Sir," he would even say sometimes to a liberal brother, "the Establishment is not such an unmitigated evil as some people consider it. What should we do in country parishes where the people are not awakened? They do the dirty work for us, my dear brother—the dirty work." These sentiments were shared, but perhaps not warmly, by Mr. Beecham's congregation, some of whom were hot Voluntaries, and gave their ministers a little trouble. But the most part took their Nonconformity very quietly, and were satisfied to know that their chapel was the first in the

connection, and their minister justly esteemed as one of the most eloquent. The Liberation Society held one meeting at the Crescent Chapel, but it was not considered a great success. At the best, they were no more than lukewarm Crescent-Chapelites, not political dissenters. Both minister and people were Liberal, that was the creed they professed. Some of the congregations Citywards, and the smaller chapels about Hampstead and Islington, used the word Latitudinarian instead; but that, as the Crescent Chapel people said, was a word always applied by the bigoted and ignorant to those who held in high regard the doctrines of Christian charity. They were indeed somewhat proud of their tolerance, their impartiality, their freedom from old prejudices. "That sort of thing will not do now-a-days," said Mr. Copperhead, who was a great railway contractor and one of the deacons, and who had himself a son at Oxford. If there had been any bigotry in the Crescent, Mr. Copperhead would have had little difficulty in transferring himself over the way to St. Paul's Church, and it is astonishing what an effect that fact had upon the mind of Mr. Beecham's flock.

Mr. Beecham's house was situated in Regent's Park, and was constructed on the ordinary model of such houses. On the ground-floor was a handsome dining-room, a room which both Mr. and Mrs. Beecham twenty years before would have considered splendid, but which now they condescended to, as not so large as they could wish, but still comfortable. The drawing-room above was larger, a bright and pleasant room, furnished with considerable "taste." Behind the dining-room, a smaller room was Mr. Beecham's study, or the library, as it was sometimes called. It was lined with book-cases containing a very fair collection of books, and ornamented with portraits (chiefly engravings) of celebrated ministers and laymen in the connection, with a bust of Mr.

Copperhead over the mantelpiece. This bust had been done by a young sculptor whom he patronized, for the great man's own house. When it was nearly completed, however, a flaw was found in the marble, which somewhat detracted from its perfection. The flaw was in the shoulder of the image, and by no means serious; but Mr. Copperhead was not the man to pass over any such defect. After a long and serious consultation over it, which made the young artist shake in his shoes, a solution was found for the difficulty.

“Tell you what, Sir,” said Mr. Copperhead; “I'll give it to the minister. It'll look famous in his little study. Works of art don't often come his way; and you'll get a block of the best, Mr. Chipstone—the very best, Sir, no expense spared—and begin another for me.”

This arrangement was perfectly satisfactory to all parties, though I will not say that it was not instrumental in bringing about certain other combinations which will be fully discussed in this history. The Beechams were mightily surprised when the huge marble head, almost as large as a Jupiter, though perhaps not otherwise so imposing, arrived at the Terrace; but they were also gratified.

“It is quite like receiving us into his own family circle,” Mrs. Beecham said with a glance at her daughter, Phœbe, junior, who, with all her pink fingers outspread, was standing in adoration before that image of wealth and fabulous luxury.

“What a grand head it is!” cried the young enthusiast, gazing rapt upon the complacent marble whisker so delightfully curled and bristling with realistic force.

“It looks well, I must say, it looks well,” said Mr. Beecham himself, rubbing his hands, “to receive such a token of respect from the



leading member of the flock.” And certainly no more perfect representation of a bell-wether ever adorned any shepherd's sanctuary.

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