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CHAPTER I.—THE SWEET SINGER.

I AM the daughter of a clergyman who formerly held a small living in —shire, and who, if he was proud of anything, was proud of his finely-trained choir. Finely-trained—that is, for a little place like Maystoke, where nothing but native talent was available. There is an old exception, however, to every rule; and so it came to pass that Maystoke happened on one occasion to receive a stranger into its musical ranks. It is about this stranger that my story is written. One Sunday, during the afternoon service, I was astonished, when we began the anthem, to hear a most beautiful voice, which I did not recognise, joining, evidently only by ear, in even the most difficult parts. It seemed to come from just below me; but as the anthem was almost new, I did not like to raise my eyes from the book, till it was finished. Then, on looking at the spot where I concluded he must be, I saw a head which almost startled me with its extraordinary crop of bright red hair. He had entered by the chancel door, and our servant had motioned him to a seat beside her. The hymn that followed the anthem proved that the owner of the hair and the voice were the same person. My father, I could see, had also found him out, for his face was turned towards him with an expression of evident delight, as he, quite unconscious of the effect he was producing, sang out of our maid's hymn-book. As soon as the sermon was over, my father was unusually quick in leaving the pulpit, and instead of going into the vestry direct, he stepped up to the sweet-voiced stranger, who was on the point of leaving the church, and asked him to wait a minute, as he wished to speak to him. He had a bold intelligent face, though rather uncouth and strange, while his eyes were of that peculiarly colourless kind that sometimes accompanies reddish hair—very bright though, and starting so far out of his head that my father afterwards used often to joke about them, and say that he was sure he must sleep with his eyes half open, for his eyes were like our curtains in the drawing-room, that could never be made to meet.

As I suspected, my father's eagerness was attributable to the desire of obtaining, if possible, the addition of such a beautiful voice to his choir. Rufus looked quite pleased at the idea when it was suggested to him, but he said he was afraid the distance at which he lived, some five miles off, at the nearest town, would prevent his attending regularly, as he knew no one in the village with whom he could spend the day. At this my father bit his lips, and, I could see, was very loth to give it up. After some consultation with my mother, my father came forward with a smile on his face, and said to our queer-looking friend, "I have talked the matter over with my wife, and we have agreed that if the inquiries we mean to make about you are satisfactory—as you say you know no one in the village—you can spend the time between morning and afternoon service with our servants, and thus get a good dinner to