

III

THIS was on Tuesday. During the next few days Peake went through a novel and very disturbing experience. He gradually became conscious of the power of that mysterious and all-but-irresistible moral force which is called public opinion. His own public friends and acquaintances connected with the chapel seemed to be, for some inexplicable reason, against him on the question of the organ subscription. They visited him, even to the Rev. Mr Copinger (whom he heartily admired as having "nothing of the parson" about him), and argued quietly, rather severely, and then left him with the assurance that they relied on his sense of what was proper. He was amazed and secretly indignant at this combined attack. He thought it cowardly, unscrupulous; it resembled brigandage. He felt most acutely that no one had any right to demand from him that hundred pounds, and that they who did so transgressed one of those unwritten laws which govern social intercourse. Yet these transgressors were his friends, people who had earned his respect in years long past and kept it through all the intricate situations arising out of daily contact. They could defy him to withdraw his respect now; and, without knowing it, they did. He was left brooding, pained, bewildered. The explanation was simply this: he had failed to perceive that the grandiose idea of the ninefold organ fund had seized, fired, and obsessed the imaginations of the Wesleyan community, and that under the unwonted poetic stimulus they were capable of acting quite differently from their ordinary selves.

Peake was perplexed, he felt that he was weakening; but, being a man of resourceful obstinacy, he was by no means defeated. On Friday morning he told his