

## THE THREE SISTERS.

## IN FOUR CHAPTERS.—CHAPTER I.

"Gabrielle, you should not stay out so late alone."

"It isn't late, sister dear, for a summer's evening. The church clock struck eight just as I turned into the little path across the field."

The first speaker, who was the eldest, raised her head from her work, and, looking at Gabrielle, said:

"For you it is too late. You are not well, Gabrielle. You are quite flushed and tired. Where have you been?"

"Nowhere but in the village," Gabrielle said.

She paused a moment, then added, rather hurriedly:

"I was detained by a poor sick woman I went to see. You don't know her, Joanna, she has just come here."

"And who is she?" Joanna asked.

"She is a widow woman, not young, and very poor. She spoke to me in the road the other day, and I have seen her once or twice since. She had heard our name in the village, and to-night I promised her that you or Bertha would go and call on her. She has been very unhappy, poor thing. You will go, sister?"

"Certainly. You should have told me before. Go, now, and take off your bonnet. You have walked too quickly home on this hot night."

Another lady entered the room just as Gabrielle was leaving it, and addressed her almost as the first had done:

"You are late, Gabrielle. What has kept you out so long!"

"Joanna will tell you," Gabrielle answered. "I have only been finding some work for you, sister," and with a smile she went away.

They were two stern, cold women—Joanna and Bertha Vaux. They lived together—they two and Gabrielle—in a dark, old-fashioned house, close to a little village, in one of the southern counties of England. It was a pretty, picturesque village, as most English villages are, with little clusters of white-washed, rose-twined cottages sprinkled through it, and a little rough stone country church, covered to the very top of the spire so thickly with ivy that it looked like a green bower. Here and there were scattered a few pleasant houses of the better sort, standing apart in sunny gardens, and scenting the air around with the smell of their sweet flowers.

But the house in which Joanna, and Bertha, and Gabrielle lived was always gloomy, and dark, and cold. It was a square brick house, with damp, unhealthy evergreens planted in front, upon which the sun never shone—summer or winter; the flags which paved the front of the door and the steps of the door were greened over with cheerless moss; and fungi grew up in the seams of the pavement. The windows, with their thick, black, clumsy frames, almost all faced

the n  
but lo  
than  
elder  
It  
had c  
thing  
in the  
house,  
Abc  
and, ir  
young  
sever  
seen or  
acts of  
miles r  
But th  
penanc  
Ther  
came, c  
alone  
months  
to whor  
their st  
Gabri  
they fir  
three ha  
beautifu  
of the g  
three ye  
changed  
when sh  
forcing i  
had grov  
less gloo  
window i  
she took  
open win  
breath of  
window :  
a pleas  
waving o  
deep brig