

"You know, I suppose, what I've come for, Mr Peake," said the old man, in that rich, deep, oily voice of which Mrs Lovatt, in one of those graphic phrases that came to her sometimes, had once remarked that it must have been "well basted in the cooking."

"I suppose I do," Peake answered diffidently.

Mr Blackhurst took off a wrinkled black glove, stroked his grey beard, and started on a long account of the inception and progress of the organ scheme. Peake listened and was drawn into an admission that it was a good scheme and deserved to succeed. Mr Blackhurst then went on to make plain that it was in danger of utterly collapsing, that only one man of "our Methodist friends" could save it, and that both Mrs Sutton and Mrs Lovatt had advised him to come and make a personal appeal to that man.

Peake knew of old, and in other affairs, the wily diplomatic skill of this Sunday School superintendent, and when Mr Blackhurst paused he collected himself for an effort which should conclude the episode at a stroke.

"The fact is," he said, "I've decided that I can't help you. It's no good beating about the bush, and so I tell you this at once. Mind you, Mr Blackhurst, if there's anyone in Bursley that I should have liked to oblige, it's you. We've had business dealings, you and me, for many years now, and I fancy we know one another. I've the highest respect for you, and if you'll excuse me saying so, I think you've some respect for me. My rule is always to be candid. I say what I mean and I mean what I say; and so, as I've quite made up my mind, I let you know straight off. I can't do it. I simply *can't* do it."

"Of course if you put it that way, if you *can't*—"

"I do put it that way, Mr Blackhurst," Peake continued quickly, warming himself into eloquence as he perceived the most effective line to pursue. "I admire