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WITHIN THE PRECINCTS BY MRS. OLIPHANT

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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WITHIN
THE PRECINCTS

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT,

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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CONTENTS

OF VOLUME II.

| | Page |
|--------------------------------------------------|------|
| CHAPTER XVII. The Musician at Home | 7 |
| — XVIII. Young Purcell | 26 |
| — XIX. Business, or Love? | 44 |
| — XX. An unconscious Trial | 60 |
| — XXI. Searchings of Heart | 77 |
| — XXII. A Chance for Law | 97 |
| — XXIII. Good Advice | 115 |
| — XXIV. A Crisis | 134 |
| — XXV. What Followed | 150 |
| — XXVI. The Fool's Paradise | 167 |
| — XXVII. A Terrible Interruption | 184 |
| — XXVIII. The Captain's Wife | 202 |
| — XXIX. The Heavings of the Earthquake | 223 |
| — XXX. Lottie's Fate | 244 |
| — XXXI. What other People thought | 261 |
| — XXXII. What Rollo had to Marry on | 277 |

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CHAPTER XVII.

THE MUSICIAN AT HOME.

THE Signor's house was one of those which, when general peacefulness had made the battlements round St. Michael's unnecessary, had grown within the outer wall. It was more like a growth than a building. Windows which looked, as we have said, as if cut in the side of a precipice, gave light to the small panelled chambers which were connected by bits of quaint passages, here and there by a little flight of stairs, with tiny vestibules and landing-places, wasting the little space there was. Room after room had no doubt been added as necessity arose, and each new room had to be connected somehow with the others. The house occupied more space than a comfortable ugly modern house with tolerably sized rooms would have done, and when the Signor came into possession it had been a miracle of picturesque awkwardness, not a room in it capable of holding more than three or four people at a time, yet as many rooms as would have

lodged a dozen—the least possible use for the greatest possible expenditure of space. The Signor, however, had built on the inner side a dining-room in red brick, which made existence possible, though it failed in the point of beauty. To tell the truth, the musician's dining-room was an eyesore to all the antiquaries and all the critics. Nobody knew by what neglect of the architect, by what partiality of the Board of Works, it had been permitted to be built. It was of no style at all, neither Gothic, like the original building, nor Queen Anne, like the fashion. He had failed in his duty in every respect. It was a square box with a large window filling up one side. It was lighted with gas. It had red curtains in bold and uncompromising rep, and a large mahogany sideboard of the worst period. How he had been allowed to build this monstrosity nobody knew. It had been made the subject of a painful discussion in the Chapter itself, where Canon Skeffington (the Honble. and Revd.) complained so bitterly of the injury done to his best principles and highest feelings, that the Dean was irritated, and took up the cudgels on his side on behalf of his favourite musician. "He has a right, I suppose, to make himself comfortable like the rest of us," the head of the community said. "No right to make my life a burden to me," said the Honourable Canon; and, he added, almost weeping, "I cannot look out of my window without seeing the thing. You talk at your ease, you