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THE SINGING BOYS AND THE SERAPHIC ART OF
MUSIC

In all Cathedrall and Collegiate Churches whatsoever, where there is a Quire founded for the Chanting and toning of the Services, There has alwaies beene some Boyes (excepting in some Countries, Eunuchs) by whose voices the upper parts in Musick have been supplied; who are usually in our Churches stiled Choristers, Boyes, brought up to manage well their Naturall voices, and likewise to have skill in Musick, who besides the present service which they performe, are as your Grafts and plants, making up Nursaries, and a Successive Supply for the perpetuating and improving of that Seraphick Art of Musick.

The bishop's coach swung through the archway, constructed for the princely sum of £133. 6s. 8d. known to the people as 'the bishop's eye', and designed as a grand entrance to the bishop's palace. The bishop had noted with pleasure the *rebus* above the archway, a punning heraldic device like a puzzle, carved from local stone, denoting the illustrious name of a predecessor.

Bishop Ralph de Beckons had spent a tiring week in Bath, reading and replying to some apostolic letters from the pope. Now he could look forward to rest and relaxation in the palace chambers and grounds. A more

serenely calm environment would be hard to find. Behind moated walls was a noble palace, with a chapel and great hall adjoining.

n/ Cedars spread their long, angled branches in graceful curves over green lawns. Swans glided by in the moat outside, and a network of streams and rivulets from the great well had been channelled through exquisite gardens.

Bishop de Beckons' favourite haunt, when he wanted to be alone, was a simple wooden seat in the palace gardens beside a kidney-shaped pool. Into this pool, the three springs pushed up millions of gallons of pure water every day, always at a constant temperature. The bishop considered this outpouring a sign of the copious goodwill of god, ever renewing and ever replenishing. It was the nearest one could get to a natural miracle. In the pebbles of the holy streams, as someone would write in another time, the sabbath slowly rang.

Reflected in the calm, placid waters of the pool was the inspiration of his entire life, a magnificent cathedral whose central tower crowned the vision he had of God's kingdom on earth, so faithfully reproduced in the water that an artist could have sketched the cathedral with ease.

≡ It was a Sunday when the bishop reached the palace. Even song in the cathedral would begin at 3.00 p.m. The dean was already preparing his vestments in the undercroft, the treasury where the cathedral's valuables were kept, including holy relics and sacred vestments, for the sung Eucharist. Barred windows and double iron-bound doors protected a small box called a pyx. Preserved inside the pyx was the blessed sacrament, the consecrated