

A LIFE INTEREST.

CHAPTER I.

RESURGAM.

REGENT'S PARK was looking coldly bright one clear March afternoon, bright with the first spring sunshine, which is more glaring than genial, while a keen north-east wind played spitefully through the trees, crisping the water within the enclosure into shuddering ripples, and searching out every cranny in the wraps of the children and nurses who were exercising within its exclusive bounds.

It made small impression, however, on a tall distinguished-looking elderly gentleman who was advancing at a good pace along the road which crosses the Broad Walk near Park Square. He was erect and vigorous, though white-haired and somewhat worn in face, with fine features and dark haughty eyes, still flashing keenly under thick grizzled brows. A long overcoat of fine cloth wrapped him from neck to heel, and from his glossy hat to his neat boots he looked the incarnation of pride and prosperity.

As he approached the gate which admits to the Broad Walk, a man who had been resting on a seat close by, his hands deep in his trowser pockets, rose lazily and strolled through it. Turning left in a purposeless manner, he paused as his eyes fell on the advancing figure. A greater contrast to himself could not be imagined; and it seemed to strike him, for a mocking smile curled his lips, while a gleam of recognition played over his countenance.

He, too, was above middle height and dark eyed, but his figure was bent and his eyes dull. A napless frock coat, white at the seams and greasy at the collar, over which bulged a coloured handkerchief, was buttoned tightly across his chest. His baggy trowers hung loosely over down-trodden boots, one of which was burst. The whole aspect of the man betokened seedy helplessness. Moreover the style of his shabby garments was decidedly un-English, and he wore a large picturesque felt hat considerably out of shape.

He stepped slowly forward, and stopped exactly in front of the advancing aristocrat, who came to a sudden halt. A look of angry surprise changed to a look of disgusted recognition as he gazed at