

friend or foe upon the new-comers; closely followed by a decrepit serving-man in a faded livery, who, after receiving with civility the self-announcement of the elder stranger, as Master Hemsworth, of Manorfield, in the marshes of Kent, proceeded to refer his request for a night's hospitality at Wildinghurst, to the superior powers within. The plea of a lame horse, and a pressing representation of the perils of a midnight journey, *with* a well-filled purse, and *without* fire-arms, were judged sufficiently urgent by the old cavalier; who was aware that not a hestel of credit stood within ten miles of his gate; and the gentlemen were accordingly requested to dismount and enter the Hall.

The younger of the two, conscious, perhaps, that the appearance of their horses might controvert the truth of their alleged dilemma, insisted upon officiating in the stable, and having been placed by the staid *maggior-l'uomo* under the guidance of a red-headed savage of a farming-lad, he proceeded with no small awkwardness, to fulfil his self-imposed duties. "Softly, my bonny Bess!" he exclaimed, as he ensconced his mettled steed in one of the forty oaken stalls of the stable, each of which was richly paved, and carved to terminate in the Willoughby crest. "Softly, my dainty dame! Thou wilt have nor master nor mate unto whom to grumble of hard fare and chilly housing, save yonder wheezing padnag, who, I wager a pistole, belongeth to no less a person than the sleek chaplain of the Hall!" The wooden leg of the veteran proprietor suggested, indeed, a ready excuse for the lamentable scantiness of his stud; but there was a general coldness, an air of decay and degradation shed over all at Wildinghurst, that accorded well with the rumours or its family annals.

The young esquire, after loitering over his task, in order to afford an opportunity to his companion of telling their story in his own way, proceeded with some hesitation towards the Hall; but he was quickly re-assured, by the shouts of laughter issuing from the door, and by the familiar attitude in which, on his entrance, he found Master Hemsworth seated at his host's right hand. On the rudely covered board, stood the remains of a pasty

and of a portly sirloin, now rapidly diminishing under the attacks of his comrade, who was cordially pledging his opposite neighbour, the family priest, in a deep cup of nut-brown ale. The two domestics stood gazing with fixed wonderment at the easy assurance with which the unbidden guest commanded their services; and began to augur somewhat suspiciously of the termination of this visit. But Sir Mark, on the contrary appeared delighted with the frank joviality of the elder Hemsworth; and was listening with rapture to his humorous description of the new-fangled pastimes of the courtiers, and of the extravagant fashions of the court-beauties.

"I tarried at Tunbridge," quoth he, "but to bait my horses; yet even in that short space of time, yonder scatter-brains," glancing significantly at his nephew as he entered, "found me time to lose half a year's rent of my goodly hope-grounds, in a game at shovel-board with one of the idlest rufflers of the Wells—a good-for-little varlet of some distinction, named George Hamilton."

Whether something in the countenance or bearing of his guests had hit the fancy of the veteran, or whether the lack of better company, to which he had long condemned himself, had rendered him little difficult to please, certain it was, that he not only graced his hospitality with friendly welcome, but even indulged in an unsuspecting freedom of speech that might have better become a more mature acquaintance. When the attendants had withdrawn, and the lamb's-wool, which in heavy pewter flagons graced the board, had begun its work of mischief upon heads ill-accustomed to such heavy potations, he added to the strictures of his unknown visitors upon the follies of the court, many bitter personalities upon its inmates.

"Ay, gentlemen," said the old man, warmly, "I have, perchance, better reason than ye wot of to curse the new-fangled fopperies. To gild the waste of yonder prodigal, many a fair rood of the Woodlands of Wildinghurst hath been turned into a waste. The proudest oaks of Kent once stretched their lusty branches over the plains whereon ye galloped this afternoon without