

THE STORY OF ANTONY GRACE.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAN IN POSSESSION.

MR. ROWLE came the day after the funeral, walking straight in, and, nodding to cook, who opened the door, hung up his shabby hat in the hall. Then, to my surprise, he took it down again, and after gazing into it as Mr. Blakeford used to do in his when he came over to our church, he turned it round, made an offer as if about to put it on wrong way first, reconsidered the matter, put it on in the regular way, and as it seemed to me drew his sword.

But it was not his sword, only a very long clay pipe which he had been carrying up his left sleeve, with the bowl in his hand. Then, thrusting the said hand into his tail-pocket, he brought out a little roll of tobacco, upon which was printed, as I afterwards saw, a small woodcut, and the conundrum, "When is a door not a door?"

"Ho!" said cook; "I suppose you're the——"

"That's just what I am, my dear," said the stranger, interrupting her; "and my name's Rowle. Introduced by Mr. Blakeford; and just fetch me a light."

"Which you'd best fetch this gentleman a light, Master Antony," said cook; "for I ain't going to bemean myself."

As she spoke she made a sort of whirlwind in the hall, and whisked herself out of the place, slamming the door at the end quite loudly.

"Waxy!" said Mr. Rowle, looking hard at me, and shutting one eye in a peculiar way. "Got a light, young un?"

"Yes," I said, feeling sorry that cook should have been so rude to the visitor: and as I hurried into the study to get a match out of the little bronze stand, and lit the curled-up wax taper that my father used to seal his particular letters, I found that Mr. Rowle had followed me, tucking little bits of tobacco in the pipe-bowl as he came.