

CHAPTER XVI.

It was now the middle of June, and my arrangements were completed for returning to England, all but the vessel. What ship should we go by? By one of the Cunard— one of the same sort as that which had brought us out so calmly and comfortably, or some other? The Cunarder, of course. Good! Fate, however, ordained it otherwise. I had given a promise that I would *lend a passage* to a fellow-mortal who had gone to America to make his fortune, but hadn't, and who now was rampant to get back again; our party was hence a large and expensive one—including the dog, six in all. A careful analysis of the different rates and fares, as charged by the different companies, showed me a tempting *difference* in favour of the Liverpool, New York, and Philadelphia Line, which consists entirely of Screw steamers, and though I had a strong dislike to *screws* of all kinds, I determined on "doing the cheap" for once, and one fine morning found me in the office of the Liverpool, New York, and Philadelphia Screw Steamship Company's office, taking tickets for self and party, for our homeward voyage from New York to Liverpool.

I should have little more now to say but for an incident occurring at this very time of ticket-taking, which, though not of a very startling nature, were it narrated in a novel, pre-written in the writer's brain, I think my readers will allow to be singular enough to merit a page or or so, in this most veracious history.

I was standing on the steps of the steam-packet agent's office, on Broadway, in the act of carefully stowing away my tickets in a pocket-book, when a lady and gentlemen ascended them, and, pre-occupied with home thoughts engendered by the occupation, I stood, unconsciously, in their way. A polite "If you please," from the gentleman, made me look up, and so remarkable was the lady's start, as I bowed my apology, that *she* tripped over her dress, and I nearly stumbled down the steps. Why tripped the lady? Wherefore stumbled I?

Just four years ago—Good gracious! Well I am going to tell you a story, and novelists are always allowed to "conduct their reader" (&c.,