

THE HAUTE NOBLESSE.

CHAPTER I.

"IN THE WEST COUNTRY."

"TAKE care, Mr. Luke Vine, sir. There's a big one coming."

The thin, little, sharp-featured, grey-haired man on a rock looked sharply round, saw the "big one coming," stooped, picked up a large basket, and, fishing-rod in hand, stepped back and climbed up a few feet, just as a heavy swell, which seemed to glide along rapidly over the otherwise calm sea, heaved, flooded the rock, on which he had been standing, ran right up so high as to bathe his feet, then sank back in a series of glittering falls which sparkled in the glorious sunshine; there was a hissing and sighing and sucking noise among the rocks, and the wave passed on along the rugged coast, leaving the sea calm and bright once more.

"Many a poor lad's been took like that, Mr. Luke, sir," said the speaker, "and never heard of again. Why, if I hadn't called out, it would have took you off your legs, and the current's so strong here you'd have been swept away."

"And there'd been an end of me, Polly, and nobody a bit the worse, eh?"

The last speaker seemed to fill his sharp, pale face full of tiny wrinkles, and reduced his eyes to mere slits, as he looked keenly at the big robust woman at his side. She was about fifty, but with her black hair as free from grey as that of a girl, her dark eyes bright, and her sun-tanned face ruddy with health, as she bent forward with a great fish-basket supported on her back by means of a broad leather strap passed over her print sun-bonnet and across her forehead.