

POPE BOOTH.

HIS MOTTO: "*Do as you are told, and don't argufy.*"

PROLOGUE.



It was a strange procession of men and women going by—the like of which I had never seen before. The scene: the Thames Embankment. The month: October of the year of grace, one thousand eight hundred and ninety, and rather a foggy day.

The men were mostly attired in a uniform, a compound of the water-side character, the fireman, and the hotel messenger. The women wore bonnets like half-closed, semi-circular sun-blinds, such as we see abroad, and dresses of dark material, sack-shaped and drawn in a little at the waist. Many wore white sashes, a welcome relief to their sombre attire. A fair proportion carried tambourines, which they rattled and flourished with energy and glee.

Anon, as the vast procession glided by, came a weird, grey-headed man, seated in a carriage, who bowed in response to a mixture of cheering, hooting, and laughter—the cheering, let me hasten to declare, predominating.

"Who is he?" I asked of a stranger at my elbow.

"The General," he replied; "he buries his wife to-day, and—"

I heard no more, thanks to the rush of a gang of ruffians on pocket-picking bent. When the wave of confusion arising from this cause had in a measure subsided, a coffin covered with flowers on a simple carriage was borne along, and I judged that it contained all that was left of the General's wife.

Coming from a far-off, lone land, I could not understand this scene. If honour is shown to dead warriors; but their wives die and are borne quietly to the grave. And why should the General bow and smile? Why should he seem to rejoice at *her* death? Why—

And so I speculated, wandering away until I reached the railway-station, and there I bought a magazine which reviews the reviewers, doubtless little to the taste of those who at one time sat undisputed judges of all things literary. Within it was the story of the "General" and his departed wife.

An amazing story. A great and good work being done

by great and good people. Alone in my chamber I read it closely, seeing naught but brave work in what had been done until I came to the General's motto, "*Do as you are told and don't argufy,*" and then I paused to think.

No harm, but much good, might come of it *now*; but, anon, when some ruler, less wise and just than he, should be at the head of this vast and growing body—what then?

And I thought and thought of the possibilities arising in the future, and I was thinking of them still when the sun went down.

CHAPTER I.

THE ARMY PREVAILS.

"THIS is the day appointed for the King to pay homage to Pope Booth the Third."

I heard these words as I stood in a wide street of a great city. Near me stood two white-haired men in seedy, threadbare black attire. One, methought, looked like a bishop on whom parlous times had fallen.

It was he who spoke, as I could tell by the answer given by the other.

"Yes; it is so," he said. "Albert Victor the Second can hold out no longer. He must yield to the arrogant demands of the head of the all-pervading Army. My brother, we must not whisper a word against it lest we be hanged or burned as heretics."

"We are the last of the bishops," returned the other, bitterly. "All the others are dead, or have recanted and become officers in the Army. Hark! the roll of drums and the rattling of tambourines. The red-jerseyed men and the Hallelujah lasses are escorting the King to his humiliation."

"Will they pass this way?"

"They must do so."

"Then let us, my brother, choose a convenient doorstep from whence we may safely view the saddening sight."

But the other demurred, and, pleading an engagement elsewhere, disappeared.

The remaining man, looking about him, soon found a suitable place for espying the coming procession in the doorway of a closed shop, which I judged by the sign overhead had once been occupied by a tobacconist. It was now in a state of semi-ruin.