

1859
(79)

CHAPTER I.

The mellow beams of the Indian summer sun had scarce penetrated through the dense woods that environed the ancient, loyal, retrogressive, aggressive, and enlightened Village of Small, when Squire Little briskly sprang from his couch, and prepared to don his nether garments. Great was the wonder of his loving spouse at his unwonted agility; and multitudinous were the enquiries with which she endeavoured to penetrate his designs.

To all her enquiries, however, he was as deaf as a post, or to use a more apt similitude, as the *Post-master General*, when a question relative to the irregularity of the mails has been unexpectedly propounded by an impertinently inquisitive member. But for all that the Little Squire—Squire Little was his proper name—was so uncommunicative to the wife of his bosom, a stranger—supposing such an individual to have intruded himself into such an awkward position as the Squire's bed-chamber—could not have failed to perceive that matters of the greatest importance occupied his attention. At times he would sigh deeply, and mutter incoherent sentences about "ruination, starvation, spoliation, tergiversation, and damnation." Then he would suddenly break out into a brilliant apostrophe, as if addressing an admiring audience, and ask the basin-stand, with all the gravity in the world, if it "was going to stand it any longer?" concluding his query by giving it such a thump that this article of domestic economy more than once gave unmistakable signs of *not* standing it any longer. Nor did the eccentric conduct of the good squire stop here, At breakfast he partook of raw beefsteaks, much to the horror of his wife, whom he appeased by stating that "the situation of the country was such that no man, deserving to be called a man,—the squire was always magnificent on his manhood—should be particularly fastidious as to a shade of Brown; and, if anything, blood agreed with his present disposition." He then struggled into his top coat—it would be ironical to call it his big coat—and having girded on an old rusty sword that had been his grandfather's, and embraced his weeping wife, who was now sure that the poor man was clean daft, he sallied out, swearing by the dust of his father's bones that the crisis of the country had come at last, and denouncing vengeance and heaping responsibility upon those by whom it had come."

A short walk brought the squire to that time-honored building which the sportive citizens of Small Village had misappropriately christened the "Town Hall." Having ascended one flight of steps and fallen down another, owing to his sword getting between his legs, he entered the building in which the trusty burghers of Small had been duly summoned by sound of Bell and Proclamation to meet, in order that they might deliberate on the state of the Nation, and devise such remedies for its dreadful condition as seemed best to their enlightened wisdom. The body of the Hall could not be said