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AND

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MASONS AND MASONS.

FOR THE CRAFTSMAN, BY G. S.

CHAPTER VI.—THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

A blithe spring morning in the early October, a cloudless blue heaven, a brisk life-giving westerly breeze from across the Blue Mountains, a smooth springy green sward dotted with majestic clumps of timber, a silence broken only by the whir of strangely gorgeous wings, a bright beautiful solitude of intense calm! Had there been present a single human being to monopolize its soothing hush and to rejoice in escape from the roar of far-off cities to such quiet commune with nature in her simplest and most becoming garb, he might easily be excused for selfishly resenting companionship of his kind. This came before the sun was high, with the cheery crack of whip-lash and clank of sabre. It came with no rattle of wheel or patter of horse-hoof, for the yielding turf could give back no such sound. But it came, for all that, in the presence of Her Majesty's mails as conveyed in one of Cobb's very uncomfortable coaches and escorted by two mounted constables, their light blue and white uniform matching well with the complexion of the climate and the scene. There were passengers in the coach, not many, though enough for pleasant light-hearted company, and merriment was unrestrained and jest and laughter floated gaily on the air. But every man there—from the youngster fresh home from his English College, to whom all this work was strange and exciting, to the old grey-bearded squatter, back to the station for the sheep-shearing through a country every mile of which was wearily familiar—was armed as though for a campaign. Holsters on the policemen's saddles, holsters inside the coach, holsters on the driver's box, and carbines and sabres