



THE FAIRHOPE VENTURE.

CHAPTER I.

RUSTIC INCIVILITY.

“**W**OULD you kindly allow me to pass?”

The voice was low and gentle, but the words came forth with a firmness which seemed to indicate that the speaker was wont to expect and find a ready deference to her behests.

She was a fair young girl, scarce a woman in physical development yet sufficiently self-reliant and mistress of her own actions; so, at least, any one would have concluded who should have watched her as she moved with firm step and erect carriage across the wide upland pasture field to the point where she now stood. That point was just in front of a low stile that intervened between the path along which the girl had been walking and the lane beyond. Here the girl stood a moment, tapping her foot nervously on the close-cropped sward, while patches of heightened colour flecked her fair cheeks. On the top rail of the