

Catholic and Protestant Emancipation.

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SOME business had taken me to a small town in the West of England, and I had to spend two or three long winter evenings in the coffee-room of the hotel. I had not much inclination for conversing with its chance occupants, and found it a dreary task to turn over and over again the London and local journals; so I inquired for a circulating library, whence I could obtain some books. I was directed to one kept by a respectable widow in the High Street. On inspecting her stock, I found that it consisted mainly of a very inferior class of novels, in a worn and greasy state, among which were several of disreputable notoriety. A few questions showed me that the widow knew little of their contents, and had no wish to be enlightened. They were supplied by a London agent, and were evidently the sweepings of the book-shops. Her customers, she said, found no fault with them, and she herself had no time to read books. She got what were asked for. So I paid my deposit, and putting aside the literature of recent date, I chose from the older stock a few books, which might serve to beguile the time — two novels, two narratives of travels, and a volume of poetry. *Frank Mildmay* and *Midshipman Easy*, by Captain Marryat, were the novels. The gallant captain had been a favourite in my school days. It might be pleasant to awake recollections of boyhood. Books of travel and adventure have always interested me. I noticed two which promised well by their titles, *The Bungalow and the Tent*, by Sullivan, and *A Journal of an Expedition Fourteen Hundred Miles up the Orinoco*, by Robinson. Of these books, or of their authors, I knew nothing. I saw that they had been printed in the first quarter of the present century. The volume of poetry was *Italy*, by Samuel Rogers. I felt ashamed at never having read this poem. Here was an opportunity of removing ignorance. From these five books I promised myself some quiet amusement, in the old sense of the word, which means the state of those who *muse* pleasantly over strange or curious