

# Weekly



# Visitor.

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## THE STORY OF A CITY ARAB.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "BOUGHTON GRANGE."

### CHAPTER XLVI.

#### I RECEIVE A VISIT FROM MY FATHER.

How, when Mr. Lawrence Simmonds died, I was retained by his son, and employed by him in his factory; how he kindly, while knowing my previous history, advanced me, step by step, until I had attained a position of trust; and how I found that the education I had contrived to pick up while only a 'City Arab,' became increasingly valuable to me—these things I shall not set down in detail. It is sufficient to say that, some two years after the events recorded in the last chapter, I was a clerk in the counting house of Mr. Richard Simmonds, and had lodgings in a neat little cottage not far from the factory, my landlady being an elderly widow, very neat and very deaf.

One winter's evening about this time, I was returning from my daily employment, and had nearly reached my comfortable home, when I was accosted by name by a man, who, in north-country dialect, asked permission to accompany me to my lodgings, saying that he had important business to communicate. There was nothing in his manner to excite alarm, or even suspicion. As far as I could judge by the imperfect light of an oil-lamp close by, he was a stout, elderly, respectable farmer; and though I was at a loss to conceive the nature of his communications, I had no hesitation in acceding to his request, and in a few minutes we were in the

little sitting room which I was permitted to call my own, and which was cheerfully lighted up by a blazing fire and a candle.

'You do not know me?' said he, in the same broad speech, as he seated himself, and, as it seemed, invited my scrutiny.

Certainly not. I had not the most distant remembrance of having seen my visitor before, and I said so. My connections and intimacies had not much lain among farmers, save my good friend at Daffodil Farm, in Kent, with whom I still kept up an occasional correspondence, and for whose sake I was disposed to give the right hand of fellowship to any agricultural stranger. And I could scarcely be deceived in setting down my visitor as a tolerably flourishing member of that community. I could not see his hands, for the thick gloves he wore, and his face was partially concealed by a red woolen comforter; but his entire appearance and manners tallied with what I had seen of Yorkshire farmerhood.

'The old woman,' said he, after a moment's pause, 'be there nubbot in t' house but she?'

'Nobody but her, besides our two selves,' I said; 'and if you have anything to say privately you need not fear being overheard. The old lady is very deaf.'

'For all that,' rejoined my strange visitor, in a tone of voice and in a manner so altered that I started with sudden surprise, 'for all that I shall take the liberty, Mr. Leigh, of securing ourselves against intrusion;' and adapting the deed to the word, he rose quickly and turned the key in the door. 'We are all right now,' he continued, trying the lock, and finding it fast; and then he again deliberately seated himself.

I cannot say that I felt no alarm, but a feeling stronger than that of mere apprehension had arisen in my mind, which overmastered it, and subdued me into silent acquiescence with the action I have described.

'Who are you, and what is your business with me?' I asked, after a moment's painful silence.

My visitor made me no verbal answer, but first throwing off his gloves and comforter and thick Whitney coat, and then gradually divesting himself of one external disguise after another, till my little table was furnished with a toilet of false eyebrows, false whiskers, an exceedingly natural-looking wig, and other minute personal appliances, my father stood revealed to me as I had last seen him at Thieves' Castle, under the title of 'the Captain.'

'You know me now,' said he, quietly, and in his natural voice.

'Yes, I know you now,' I responded in his own words, faintly; for I was overcome with terror.

'You need not be afraid, he said, somewhat contemptuously. 'If I had the power, I have not the disposition—at least I have not the intention,—to do you any injury.'

'Why have you sought me?' I asked.

'Because I wished to satisfy myself, with my own eyes, that you are alive, when I had reason to think you were lost in the shipwreck, and because I am about to leave the country, probably never to return,' he said; 'and whatever you may think of my past conduct towards you, I would not go away without a last interview with my own and only son. You do not doubt our relationship, I suppose?' he added.

I had no reason to question it, and I said so.

'You need not,' he went on, 'for there can