

MARK MERIDEN.

BY MRS. H. E. B. STOWE.

"Come, Mark Meriden! don't settle down into an old grandfather before your time—a pretty wife's a pretty thing, Mark, and a pretty house is a pretty thing—but hang it!—one must have a little of life."

Mark Meriden stood at his desk, giving a last look at his books, while Ben Sandford—the roguish—the merry—the song singing—the Ben of all Bens, was thus urging on him the claims of a projected frolic that evening. Now Ben was precisely the messenger for such an embassy—there was fun in the twinkle of his blue eye, and a world of waggery in the turn of his head, and in a pair of broad roguish dimples that went merrily dodging in and out of his cheeks every time he spoke, and he had laid hold of Mark's arm to drag him away. But Mark shook off his hand, and finished summing up a column of figures—put the blotting paper into the book, and the book into the place, wiped his pen—all with an air of great thoughtfulness—and, at last, turning to Ben, said—"I think I won't go this time."

"Now why not?" said Ben, eagerly.

"Because—because," said Mark, smiling; "because I have an odd fancy that I should like Mrs. Meriden's company better this evening."

"Hang Mrs. Meriden—beg pardon, Mark—hang myself for saying so—but one don't like to see a fine fellow buried alive!—come, take a real wake up with us."

"Thank you, Ben, but I hav'n't been asleep and don't need it. So I'll go home and see my wife"—and thereat Mark turned a resolute footstep homeward as a well-trained husband ought.

"Now," says one of our readers, "who was Mark Meriden?"—You would not have asked, good reader, if you had lived in the town of—, when his name first appeared on the outside of one of its most fashionable shops, "Mark Meriden," surrounded by those waving insignia of grace and fashion that young belles need to have their eyes turned off from beholding.—Every thing in the tasteful establishment told of well arranged business, and Mark himself, the mirror of fashion, faultless in every article of costume, quick, attentive, polite, was every day to be seen there winning "golden opinions from all sorts of people." Mark's shop became the resort of high ton—the fashionable exchange, the promenade of beauty and wealth,

who came there to be enlightened as to the ways and means of disposing of their surplus revenue—to see and to be seen. So attentive, polite, and considerate was Mark, so profound his bows, so bright his eyes, so unexceptionable his whiskers, that it might have proved a dangerous resort for the ladies, had not a neat, tasteful house, going up in the neighbourhood, been currently reported as the future residence of an already elected Mrs. Meriden; and in a few months, the house neatly finished, and tastefully furnished, received a very pretty lady who called herself to that effect. She was as truly refined and lovely a woman as ever formed the centre flower in a domestic bouquet, and Mark might justly be pardoned for having as good again an opinion of himself for having been fortunate enough to secure her.

Mark had an extensive circle of business and pleasure acquaintances, for he had been one of the social, companionable sort, whose money generally found its way out of his pocket in very fair proportion to the rate it came in. In short, he was given to clubs, oyster suppers, and now and then a wine party, and various other social privileges for elevating one's spirits and depressing one's cash, that abound among enlightened communities.

But nevertheless, at the bottom of Mark's head, there was a very substantial stratum of a certain quality called common sense, a trait, which though it was never set down in any chart of phrenology, may very justly be called a faculty, and one too which makes a very striking difference among people as the world goes. In consequence of being thus constituted, Mark, when he found himself in love with, and engaged to a very pretty girl, began to reflect with more than ordinary seriousness on his habits, ways, and manners of life. He also took an accurate survey of his business, formed an average estimate of his future income on the soberest probabilities, and determined to live a little even within that. He also provided himself with a small account book, with which he intended to live in habits of very close acquaintance, and in this book he designed to note down all the savings consequent upon the retrenching of certain little extras, before alluded to, in which he had been in the habit of pretty freely indulging himself.

Upon the present occasion, it had cost him something of an effort to say "no," for Mark was one of your easy "clever fellows" to whom the enunciation of this little syllable causes as much trouble as all the gutturals of the German. However, when he came in sight