

stately family portraits catching at the general light-heartedness, winked and grimaced to each other in a most unwonted manner. Having timed myself very correctly, I had arrived just twenty minutes before luncheon with the firm intention of enjoying the good cheer of the Hall, and in this I was not disappointed (a thing I abhor, being deceived in such matters; I have never forgotten my inward indignation on seeing the owner of a mansion to which I one day repaired, quietly "slope" off the path and disappear behind a convenient haystack. Of course when I rode up to the house-door, I was told that every one was out, as if I were not already painfully aware of the fact.) After the meal, Mrs. Marston went away to look after her household affairs—I always excused her with unfeigned joy; oh what dinners we did have, when she was there!—and Julia retired to her boudoir to indite an affectionate note to one of my sisters, which notes invariably contained a great many underlined passages and five or six post scripts, together with a cargo of "kind loves" sufficient to have peopled Siberia.

Being thus left alone with the old gentleman, I began to cast about for a beginning to my cut-and-dry revelation of Ned's fortune and fate, when, as I was in the midst of a most intricate conversational problem, Mr. Marston suddenly broke the silence by saying:—

"Come, Frank, another glass of claret, and let me hear about Mr. Gray's wonderful Vergil."

I gazed at him in speechless surprise, the orifice of my mouth closely resembling in form and size that of those giant gaping faces you throw apples at, in the vain hope of getting something for your trouble. How on earth he knew about the Vergil, the possession of which by Ned we had fancied a profound secret, was an enigma I vainly tried to solve during the time that my features gradually resumed their normal appearance. I must have looked a thorough idiot, for my companion after vainly trying to restrain himself burst into a loud, hearty peal of laughter, such as I had never yet heard from "the bear." This increased, instead of diminishing, my astonishment. As soon as I had recovered from my intense surprise and rudeness, I apologized to Mr. Marston.