

2087)

ÉCARTÉ.

CHAPTER I.

"STEAM!—steam!—eternally steam! steam packets across the Atlantic—steam engines for our manufactures—birds hatched by steam—linen washed by steam! Why, surely, this is nothing less than the Promethean fire stolen from Heaven in former days, and since fallen into disrepute. No project is now undertaken without steam. The whole secret of our existence will be reduced to the universal influence of steam: we shall live by steam—die by steam, and go to Heaven, or to the other place, by steam. What say you, Clifford? what is your idea of this most gigantic of human inventions?"

This oration, the longest he had ever been known to make on any other subject than foxhunting and the gout, was uttered by Sir Edward Delamaine, an elderly, good-natured baronet, of Norman descent, who, comfortably seated over his wine in Grosvenor-street, with his legs wrapped in flannel, was performing the two-fold operation of discussing his second bottle of claret, and reading the *Courier* for the evening. At the opposite extremity of the table, sat a fine dark-looking young man, his nephew, who, like most nephews, in a *tête-à-tête* with an old uncle, was evidently indulging in thoughts that had not the most remote connexion with anything around him. He had regularly settled himself into a musing attitude. His legs were crossed—his left hand was thrust into the bosom of his waistcoat, and (a *point d'appui* having been formed by the curvature of his right arm, the