

THE LION IN THE PATH

(From the Publisher's advanced sheets.)

Continued from page 276.)

CHAPTER LII.—COOMBE VALLEY.

The wives of the workmen in the silk mill belonging to Coombe Brothers were busy gossiping, one fine warm October evening at their doors, some of them engaged in hand labours connected with the silk, others scolding their noisy children, and all looking to see the smoke cease to pour out of the factory chimneys—the usual signal for the speedy return of their husbands—when an incident occurred to disturb the ordinary placidity of life in Coombe Valley.

A farmer's light cart drove up to the door of the only house that had the word "Lodging" displayed on a card in the window, and an aged-looking gentleman in a violet suit, and wearing a light wig, asked if he could be accommodated there for a few weeks, as he had been told the spring waters, for which the valley was famous in the neighbourhood, though unknown

to strangers, would be good for a special complaint.

The woman of the house came to the cart, her handsome face looking flushed, for she had been toasting Yorkshire cakes ready for her good man, and said, with a curtsy—

"Oh, please, sir, we only let a room for workmen, or poor, but decent travellers. I should be ashamed to show it to a gentleman like you!"

"My good dame," was the reply, "if I am a gentleman I am a very poor one, I am sorry to say—too poor to go to fashionable watering-places; and therefore I hope you'll take me in, for I am sure—I see it in your face—you would make me comfortable."

The woman looked pleased, and asked him at all events, before the farmer put down his bundle, to come in and see the room.

"Yes, that will be best," said the gentleman.

The room was up-stairs, was long, of very old shape, through the slopes of the roof, but, on the whole, convenient enough if the tenant would only mind not to knock his head against the beams of the ceiling, or suddenly precipitate himself down a flight of stairs by overlooking

the precise point where they began to descend almost from the middle of the floor.

It was scrupulously clean, had a faint smell of apples, which the hostess apologised for, and said she would remedy—she would take the apples away, as they were over the ceiling, and the roof at one part was open. He (the gentleman) said he liked apples, and that they might remain on the understanding that he was, in revenge of the smell, to be at liberty to taste. And then they both laughed heartily at this harmless joke.

The white bed looked quite luxurious to the late traveller, who said he was tired, and was a bit of an invalid besides, so the bargain was soon made: the gentleman in violet was to be boarded and lodged for twelve shillings a week, and find his own ale, and have the use of the common sitting-room whenever he pleased.

The new comer went to bed early that night, and in came one neighbour after another, each with the pretence of some little bit of business to transact, but really to gossip about the strange gentleman.

Everybody liked his appearance; everybody



Away went the dogs, soon leaving Butcher behind.