

thanks to the fine batting of Joe Verrill, the Hilton apothecary's assistant, been defeated almost in the arms of victory. It had been a great day for Withington and, as a matter of consequence, for the Crooked Billet, whose old sign,—suggestive of the old masters in the general indistinctness of its symbolism,—swung to and fro over the door as merrily as its hinges, made when William IV. was king, would tolerate. Generally speaking, the hinges had a habit of creaking, especially at night, but the day previous to the cricket match Andrew Mossingill had sent a boy, provided with oil and a goose feather, up a ladder to lubricate the iron work of the sign, while the landlord himself, type of your men of substance in a well-ordered community, posted his two hundred and twenty-five pounds of avoirdupois at the foot as a precaution against accident.

Now that the last of the cricketers had departed mine host had leisure to notice that his feet were sore, and to reflect that in this life every piece of good fortune has its attendant drawbacks. Except for a few labourers, come to take their evening pint of beer and to smoke, the house was at last quiet, so that Andrew, with a sigh of relief, changed his boots for an easy pair of brown leather slippers, and drawing an armchair up to the window allowed the cool evening breeze free play through the rather scanty locks of hair which formed a sort of tonsure above his heavy but good-natured face. Through the open window he could see the long dusty road to the market town stretching away on the south-east, and in his present mood Andrew was not at all sorry to observe that it was free from any sign or token of the ubiquitous commercial traveller. As the night closed in the laborers, one after another, left the house until the landlord was finally left alone. Now and then a servant maid would look in from the outer room, which was more properly the kitchen, inasmuch as the cooking of the house was performed there, and at times he could hear his wife's

voice as she superintended the general clearing up there and in the bar parlor. Outside the village was so still that the occasional bark of a dog, probably Dr. Teulon's fox terrier, whose kennel was in the stable yard, was at discord with the general tranquillity, a something to be resented, especially when, as happened now and then, Andrew Mossingill began to nod his head. It was now too dark to see beyond the village, and Andrew, having made up his mind to go to bed, shut the window, laid down his pipe, and crossed the room to announce his intention to his wife. As he stepped into the passage, where a wall-lamp was burning, the figure of a man appeared at the front door of the hostelry, and a single glance sufficed to show that it was a stranger and presumably a guest. By no means overjoyed to see him, the landlord answered his salutation somewhat gruffly.

"I can stay here for the night, I suppose," said the stranger, coming into the passage.

"Yes, sir," was Andrew's answer, "but we have had a busy day,—cricket match,—and if you want supper I am afraid it must be a cold one. There is meat, cold roast beef and mutton, and cheese. In here, if you please."

Opening the door of the bar parlor, a fairly comfortable little room ornamented with engravings of racehorses and prize cattle, Andrew ushered the guest into the apartment and excused himself for a minute while he went for a light. On his return he found the stranger seated, and now that he was able to survey him at better advantage the landlord was satisfied with himself for having refrained from his first impulse to show him into the kitchen. The stranger was simply dressed in a plain short-cut coat of durable material, but his features were high and, as Andrew thought, by no means common. As the landlord, placing the lamp in the centre of the round table, stood anticipating his guest's order, the latter, lifting his head suddenly like one emerging from a reverie, said: