

CHAPTER THE THIRD.

MARSTON HALL.

My first care, after I had got over the unavoidable ceremony calls, was to betake myself to Marston Hall, whose inhabitants were sevenfold more interesting to me since Ned's confession.

So I rode over one fine afternoon, when the bright sunshine had softened the frost-bound earth, and the clear air breathed life to my frame,—and found the whole circle assembled in the bow window of the vast dining-room. This recess was a peculiar favourite of mine; it was so cozy and comfortable,—just large enough to admit of a quartett, which could be separated from the rest of the room by drawing the heavy, sombre curtains. Mr. Marston was highly gratified at my early appearance at the Hall, and testified it in his own way; Mrs. Marston and the lovely Julia were, I dare say, equally pleased, though I could not help fancying that some one else would have been still more welcome. And why should not he? After all I had no pretensions to Julia's love, though I confess to having looked at her with greater interest on account of that passage about the German philosopher. I felt great sympathy for Ned, a sympathy that grew livelier with the thought of that "heretic" as I termed him, rejoicing and feasting at hospitable Ardglas.

But as usual, I am wandering away and will once more forget my subject and all about it. Be kind enough, gentle reader, when I sin again to bring me back to my senses, either by means of a pin carefully inserted into my body—which process invariably awoke the drowsy Pillicoddy—or by a tap of your riding-whip, if you have one, as—well, never mind who—I had come prepared to see the ladies somewhat sorrow-stricken and the beautiful Julia pensive and sad, but from a cause I was soon to know, they wore smiling faces and their eyes, (hers—properly speaking) flashed with pleasure and anticipation. Old Marston himself seemed to have abandoned for the nonce, that gruffness which had procured him among the country people, the surname of "the black bear." There was an unusual festive look about the dark room—the huge fire crackled and roared as I had never heard it before—and the