

gallop together—as we used to do in the old days, Keir."

But to this proposal Eric Keir appears any thing but agreeable.

"By no means," he rejoins, hastily. "At least I know they have nothing you would care to mount; and I am quite at your service, Moxon, if you wish to speak to me.—Here, ostler! hold my horse."

"But, why should I keep you from your ride?"

"Because I prefer it; prefer, that is to say, speaking to a friend quietly to howling at him across the road. Let us turn out of this courtyard, where every wall has ears and every window a pair of eyes. And now what is your business with me?"

The young men have gained the road by this time, which is sufficiently removed from the town to be very dusty, and shaded by leafy trees.

"Who would ever have thought of meeting you out here, Keir?" is Moxon's first remark. "And how long is it since you developed a taste for country lanes and hedges?"

"I don't admire quickset hedges more than I ever did; but, when a man rides for exercise, one direction is as good as another."

"But what induced you to remove your horse from Turnhill's? Didn't they do justice to him?"

"Well—yes—" in a hesitating manner. "I had no particular fault to find with them; but these stables are more convenient."

"Less so, I should have imagined. Why, you have nearly a mile more to walk to them."

"Perhaps I like walking: any way, that's my business. What's yours?"

At this curt rejoinder, Saville Moxon turns round and regards him steadily in the face.

"What is the matter, Keir?" he says, kindly. "Are you ill? And, now I come to look at you, you have certainly grown much thinner since I saw you last; and, if you were not such a lazy fellow, I should say you had been overworking yourself."

To which Keir responds, with a harsh laugh:

"Yes, Moxon, that's it—too much study. It's an awfully bad thing for young fellows of our age—so trying to the constitution! Ha! ha! ha!"

"But you really don't look yourself, Keir, for all that. I am afraid you must have been living too fast. Don't do it, dear old fellow—for all our sakes."

The affectionate tone touches some chord in Eric Keir's heart, and he answers, almost humbly:

"Indeed, I have not been living fast, Moxon; on the contrary, I think I have been keeping better hours this term than usual. One comes so soon to the conviction that all that kind of thing is not only degrading, but wrong. Yet one may have troubles, nevertheless. How are all your people at home?"

"Very well indeed, thank you; and that brings me to the subject of my business with you. It is odd that I should have met you this afternoon, considering how much separated we have been of late; for, if I had not done so, I should have been obliged to write."

"What about?"

"I had a letter from your brother Muiraven this morning."

"Ah!—more than I had; it's seldom either of them honors me."

"Perhaps they despair of finding you—as I almost began to do. Any way, Lord Muiraven's letter concerns you as much as myself. He wants us to join him in a walking-tour."

"When?"

"During the vacation, of course."

"Where to?"

"Brittany, I believe."

"I can't go."

"Why not? it will be a jolly chance for you. And my brother Alick is most anxious to be of the party. Fancy what fun we four should have!—it would seem like the old school-days coming over again."

"When we were always together, and always in scrapes," Keir interrupts, eagerly. "I should like to go."

"What is there to prevent you?"

His face falls immediately.

"Oh, I don't know—nothing in particular—only, I don't fancy it will be such fun as you imagine; these tours turn out such awful failures sometimes; besides—"

"Besides—what?"

"It will be a great expense; and I'm rather out of pocket this term."

"That is no obstacle, for you are to go as Muiraven's guest. He says especially—let me see, where is the letter?"—producing it from his pocket as he speaks. "Ah! here it is: 'Tell Eric he is to be my guest, and so are you'—though, for the matter of that," continues Moxon, as he refolds the letter and puts it in the envelope, "my accepting his offer, and your accepting it, are two very different things."

"I can't go, nevertheless; and you may write and tell him so."