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BY WHAT AUTHORITY?

PART I

CHAPTER I

THE SITUATION

To the casual Londoner who lounged, intolerant and impatient, at the blacksmith's door while a horse was shod, or a cracked spoke mended, Great Keynes seemed but a poor backwater of a place, compared with the rush of the Brighton road eight miles to the east from which he had turned off, or the whirling cauldron of London City, twenty miles to the north, towards which he was travelling.

The triangular green, with its stocks and horse-pond, overlooked by the grey benignant church-tower, seemed a tame exchange for seething Cheapside and the crowded ways about the Temple or Whitehall; and it was strange to think that the solemn-faced rustics who stared respectfully at the gorgeous stranger were of the same human race as the quick-eyed, voluble townsmen who chattered and laughed and grimaced over the news that came up daily from the Continent or the North, and was tossed to and fro, embroidered and discredited alternately, all day long.

And yet the great waves and movements that, rising in the hearts of kings and politicians, or in the sudden strokes of Divine Providence, swept over Europe and England, eventually always rippled up into this placid country village; and the lives of Master Musgrave, who had retired upon his earnings, and of old Martin, who cobbled the ploughmen's shoes, were definitely affected and changed by the plans of far-away Scottish gentlemen, and the