

JOHN HARKER'S BOND.

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CHAPTER III.

"MAN AND WIFE."



WELL, John, I hope 'twas to settle his bill that Mr. Atherfield came riding down to-day," said Mrs. Harker to her husband, the village wheelwright.

"Why, no, wife," replied John, somewhat in confusion, "'twas not 'zackly that."

"Then what did 'ee want wi' pen and ink, for I saw 'ee run out wi' inkstand as I come in from the ch'ken? You haven't never put your name to any of his bills again, I do hope, John?"

"Well, wife, don't you see, 'twas right the time afore, so why shouldn't I help a neighbour over a temp'rary trouble?"

"Temp'rary fiddlesticks!" exclaimed Mrs. Harker in high dudgeon; "you'll get let in, sure as you're a livin' man, John. What's Mr. Atherfield got to be in trouble

about if he'd stay at home and not go tailing about the country to all the race meetings? Nay, John, 'tis no use to tell me; I knows all about it; and I don't hold with such folks as Mr. Atherfield taking the bread from a poor man's mouth, and that's just what 'twill come to. Why don't he go to his rich relations at the Park to put their name on his bills?"

"Why, wife, you know that they don't speak."

"Yes, and why don't they speak? Only because our Squire is 'shamed of his ne'er-do-well cousin, and feels he's a disgrace to his name. I wouldn't give him a penny, not if 'twas to keep him from starvin'—no, that I wouldn't!"

"Why, missis, now, I say, don't 'ee say sich things, you that always prides yourself that nobody goes away hungry or empty-handed. Now who was it I saw go off wi' a pudden, and some milk, and a egg or two, no longer ago than this morning?"

"Ah, well, that was for poor old Dame White, a poor old bedridden body. 'Twould be a shame to let her want while we've got enough and to spare; and, John, I said wrong about Mr. Atherfield, I spoke in haste and wrath. I shouldn't have the heart to let him or any other poor fellow-creature starve, I do hope; but it do vex me, that it do, that you will be so come over by the likes of he, and his way of talkin'. What's brought him to this pass, to want to come to a poor working-man to give his bond for him? He should be able to hold his head higher than that. 'Tis his cards, and betting, and racing that's brought him to this pass, 'tis bad ways; and, John, we knows 'tis, and we haven't got no right to encourage him in it, that's what I think. And how much have you signed for this time? Not very much, I do hope."

John Harker looked very sheepish at this question, and hesitated before replying. His silence roused a feeling of anxiety in his wife's breast. Before