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WHAT WILL HE DO WITH IT?

VOL. I.

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BY

PISISTRATUS CAXTON.

(SIR EDWARD BULWER LYTTON, BART.)

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VOL. I.



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BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

In which the History opens with a description of the Social Manners, Habits, and Amusements of the English People, as exhibited in an immemorial National Festivity. — Characters to be commemorated in the History, introduced and graphically portrayed, with a nasological illustration. — Original suggestions as to the idiosyncrasies engendered by trades and callings, with other matters worthy of note, conveyed in artless dialogue after the manner of Herodotus, Father of History (Mother unknown).

It was a summer fair in one of the prettiest villages in Surrey. The main street was lined with booths, abounding in toys, gleaming crockery, gay ribbons, and gilded gingerbread. Farther on, where the street widened into the ample village-green, rose the more

pretending fabrics which lodged the attractive forms of the Mermaid, the Norfolk Giant, the Pig-faced Lady, the Spotted Boy, and the Calf with Two Heads; while high over even these edifices, and occupying the most conspicuous vantage-ground, a lofty stage promised to rural play-goers the "Grand Melo-dramatic Performance of The Remorseless Baron and the Bandit's Child." Music, lively if artless, resounded on every side; — drums, fifes, penny-whistles, cat-calls, and a hand-organ played by a dark foreigner, from the height of whose shoulder a cynical but observant monkey eyed the hubbub and cracked his nuts.

It was now sunset — the throng at the fullest — an animated joyous scene. The day had been sultry; no clouds were to be seen, except low on the western horizon, where they stretched, in lengthened ridges of gold and purple, like the border-land between earth and sky. The tall elms on the green were still, save, near the great stage, one or two, upon which young urchins had climbed; and their laughing faces peered forth, here and there, from the foliage trembling under their restless movements.

Amidst the crowd, as it streamed saunteringly along, were two spectators — strangers to the place, as was notably proved by the attention they excited, and the broad jokes their dress and appearance provoked from the rustic wits, — jokes which they took with amused good-humour, and sometimes retaliated with a zest

which had already made them very popular personages; indeed, there was that about them which propitiated liking. They were young, and the freshness of enjoyment was so visible in their faces, that it begot a sympathy, and wherever they went, other faces brightened round them.

One of the two whom we have thus individualised was of that enviable age, ranging from five-and-twenty to seven-and-twenty, in which, if a man cannot contrive to make life very pleasant, — pitiable, indeed, must be the state of his digestive organs. But you might see by this gentleman's countenance that if there were many like him, it would be a worse world for the doctors. His cheek, though not highly coloured, was yet ruddy and clear; his hazel eyes were lively and keen; his hair, which escaped in loose clusters from a jean shooting-cap set jauntily on a well-shaped head, was of that deep sunny auburn rarely seen but in persons of vigorous and hardy temperament. He was good-looking on the whole, and would have deserved the more flattering epithet of handsome, but for his nose, which was what the French call "a nose in the air" — not a nose supercilious, not a nose provocative, as such noses mostly are, but a nose decidedly in earnest to make the best of itself and of things in general — a nose that would push its way up in life, but so pleasantly that the most irritable fingers would never itch to lay hold of it. With such a nose a man