

PUT YOURSELF IN
HIS PLACE.

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CHAPTER I.

HILLSBOROUGH and its outlying suburbs make bricks by the million, spin and weave both wool and cotton, forge in steel from the finest needle up to a ship's armour, and so add considerably to the kingdom's wealth.

But industry so vast, working by steam, on a limited space, has been fatal to beauty: Hillsborough, though built on one of the loveliest sites in England, is perhaps the most hideous town in creation. All ups and downs and back slums. Not one of its wriggling, broken-backed streets has handsome shops in an unbroken row. Houses seem to have battled in the air, and stuck wherever they tumbled down dead out of the mêlée. But, worst of all, the city is pockmarked with public-houses, and bristles with high round chimneys. These are not confined to a locality, but stuck all over the place like cloves in an orange. They defy the law, and belch forth massy volumes of black smoke, that hang like acres of crape over the place, and veil the sun and the blue sky even in the brightest day; but in a fog—why, the air of Hillsborough looks a thing to plough, if you want a dirty job.

More than one crystal stream runs sparkling down the valleys, and enters the town; but they soon get

defiled, and creep through it heavily charged with dyes, clogged with putridity, and bubbling with poisonous gases, till at last they turn to mere ink, stink, and malaria, and people the churchyards as they crawl.

This infernal city, whose water is blacking, and whose air is coal, lies in a basin of delight and beauty: noble slopes, broad valleys, watered by rivers and brooks of singular beauty, and fringed by fair woods in places; and, eastward, the hills rise into mountains, and amongst them towers Cairnhope, striped with silver rills, and violet in the setting sun.

Cairnhope is a forked mountain, with a bosom of purple heather and a craggy head. Between its forks stood, at the period of my story, a great curiosity; which merits description on its own account, and also as the scene of curious incidents to come.

It was a deserted church. The walls were pierced with arrow-slits, through which the original worshippers had sent many a deadly shaft in defence of their women and cattle, collected within the sacred edifice at the first news of marauders coming.

Built up among the heathery hills in times of war and trouble, it had outlived its uses. Its people had long ago gone down into the fruitful valley, and raised another church in their midst, and left this old house of God alone, and silent as the tombs of their forefathers that lay around it.

It was no ruin, though on the road to decay. One of the side walls was much lower than the other, and the roof had two great waves, and was heavily clothed, in natural patterns, with velvet moss, and sprinkled all over with bright amber lichen: a few tiles had slipped off in two places, and showed the rafters brown with

time and weather: but the structure was solid and sound; the fallen tiles lay undisturbed beneath the eaves; not a brick, not a beam, not a gravestone had been stolen, not even to build the new church: of the diamond panes full half remained; the stone font was still in its place, with its Gothic cover, richly carved; and four brasses reposed in the chancel, one of them loose in its bed.

What had caused the church to be deserted had kept it from being desecrated; it was clean out of the way: no gipsy, no vagrant, ever slept there, and even the boys of the village kept their distance. Nothing would have pleased them better than to break the sacred windows time had spared, and defile the graves of their forefathers with pitch-farthing and other arts: but it was three miles off, and there was a lion in the way: they must pass in sight of Squire Raby's house; and, whenever they had tried it, he and his groom had followed them on swift horses that could jump as well as gallop, had caught them in the churchyard, and lashed them heartily; and the same night notice to quit had been given to their parents, who were all Mr. Raby's weekly tenants: and this had led to a compromise, and flagellation 2.

Once or twice every summer a more insidious foe approached. Some little party of tourists, including a lady who sketched in water and never finished anything, would hear of the old church, and wander up to it. But Mr. Raby's trusty groom was sure to be after them, with orders to keep by them, under guise of friendship, and tell them outrageous figments, and see that they demolished not, stole not, sculptured not.

All this was odd enough in itself, but it astonished