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HENRY SMEATON.

A JACOBITE STORY

OF

THE REIGN OF GEORGE THE FIRST.

BY

G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.

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BY
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AUTHOR OF "THE FATE," "THE FORGERY," "LEONORA D'ORCO,"
"THE OLD OAK CHEST," "AGNES SOREL," ETC. ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES

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HENRY SMEATON.

CHAPTER I.

THE life of man, like the life of society, goes in epochs. There are periods at which fair fortune, or ill fortune seems to begin or end; and a long succession of bright or dark days follows, during which no folly seems capable of clouding the sunshine — no precaution sufficient to avert the storm.

The Earl of Eskdale was that day destined to disappointment when, after a long and tiresome ride, fatiguing from the slowness at which the troop moved, he reached Ale Manor, and was admitted, strictly guarded, to the house and to his own rooms. He found that Sir John Newark had gone out about an hour before, and had taken Emmeline and Richard with him. There was no resource but to procure what letters, money, and apparel he required, and to accompany Captain Smallpiece on the road towards Exeter. The fine, wild scenery round Ale looked more beautiful than ever, though the day was not so promising as many which had preceded it. The sky indeed was generally blue, and

the air warmer than it had been in the month of July: but ever and anon came heavy masses of cloud, floating distinct, low, and heavy, and looking like the flying island of Laputa to the eyes of Gulliver. From time to time, too, they had let fall, in passing, a few large drops of rain: and, amongst the mistiness which hung about the south-west, might be seen strange forms of hardening vapours of a light reddish hue where they caught the rays of the sun.

When Smeaton descended from the room he had inhabited, in order to remount, he found several of the servants in the hall, with old Mrs. Culpepper at their head. She seemed to witness his captivity with a stoical sort of apathy, which he knew to be far from her nature, and took no more notice of him than by dropping a formal curtsy as he passed. He easily understood her motives, and merely said —

“Be so good as to inform Sir John Newark, madam, that I trust to be back here in a few days. Do not let him make himself at all uneasy on my account; for, as he well knows, I have given no offence to the existing government, and can therefore be in no danger.”

“I will tell him, sir,” replied Mrs. Culpepper; and the young nobleman mounted and rode on.

The pace at which Captain Smallpiece thought fit to proceed was, as I have hinted, the very slowest possible; and it was evident to Smeaton that he did not intend to reach Exeter that night; but the clouds, which began to gather thick and lurid in the sky some way before they reached the hamlet and church of Aleton, induced him to quicken his movements a little. Rain was beginning to fall when they passed the small public-house; and the sergeant of the troop, who seemed on very familiar terms with his com-

manding officer, ventured to hint that it might be as well to stop there and refresh the men and horses.

"No, no, Jack," replied the captain. "We must go on a little farther till we come to Norton-Newchurch. There, we'll halt at old Mother Gandy's. She brews the best, and I owe her a turn."

Perhaps he regretted, before long, that he had determined to proceed; for the menacing aspect of the clouds was soon changed into active operations. Thunder, lightning, and torrents of rain, pursued the party for the next three miles, which was the distance between Aleton and Newchurch, and not a man but was drenched to the skin, when the party dismounted at the door of the inn — if inn it could be properly called, being nothing more than a long, rambling public-house, of two low stories, looking like half-a-dozen cottages put together.

As soon as he was under shelter, Captain Smallpiece drew forth his watch, and found that he had contrived to make it six o'clock before his arrival. This was just what he intended, apparently: for he abruptly declared that, with wearied men and horses, it would be impossible to reach Exeter that night. He then made arrangements for the accommodation of his soldiers, and demanded a private room for himself and his prisoners, at the door of which he planted the trooper whom he most disliked in the party, to perform, in his dripping clothes, the wearisome office of sentry.

"Now, my Lord," he said, as soon as the door was shut, "what will you please to treat the men with? Gadzooks! I shall be glad enough to put something warm into my own stomach; and I dare say, they will too, poor devils!"

Smeaton smiled, and replied —