A BEGGAR ON HORSEBACK.

By the Author of Lost Sir Massingberd.

CHAPTER I.

SLOGAN.

On the northern coast of North Wales stands Slogan, with its foot in the sea. It is a great mountain, great in size, though that is its least remarkable attribute; great in wealth, for it is a treasure-house of useful stone; and great in dim historic memories. On its summit was once the camp of a British host, year after year; but the Roman eagles never flew so high. Around it still survive, like circlets about a monarch's crown, three mighty rings of *debris*, that were, a thousand years ago, three ramparts of stone. Within them are still visible the casemates in which the defenders lived, and watched as from an eyrie land and sea. Many a vale, now fertile, can be seen from it, stretched out like an open map, and the rugged outlines of a hundred hills. On the calmest day in June there is wind enough on Slogan's top to belly out the folds of a royal standard, which mayhap (in some shape or another) in days of old it did.

But at present he is high and huge enough, and though girdled about by tramways, and divided into stages by inclines (which should be rather called "perpendiculars"), these are scarcely to be seen from the foot of him at all. You must toil up some winding path, worn in the slag and refuse, to discover them. Then you will also find that Slogan is a very ant-hill of human beings. About his forehead, men are clustering like ants indeed; appearing and disappearing, some with burdens and some without, but all in motion. The mountain resounds with the stroke of their picks, with the echoes of the bugles, which give warning that a blast is about to take place; and with the roar of the blasts themselves. From terrace to terrace the stone is carried in huge trucks, that descend with immense velocity, and are connected by an endless chain, which by their weight at the same time hauls up "the empties." By the side of these inclines are ladders of stone, by which the quarrymen go up and down. These workers, whose toiling lies in so weird a spot, two thousand feet and more above the fields in which their forefathers labored (for this trade is comparatively new), are, in their appearance, different from other men. They are giants—often in height, but always in thews and sinews. The breeze of the mountain or of the sea perpetually blows upon them, and they thrive in it amazingly. The hammers which they use with ease a field-laborer could scarcely lift. They are as good-natured as were the Goths, but, like them, are subject to fits of passion, and then—

They are affable, but it is no use addressing them in the English tongue, because they do not speak it. Their reply is what sounds sadly like "damned na sense;" but then, we're standing on Welsh ground, and they are when accompanied by the exhibition of a silver coin. For the rest, the magistrates assure you that they are an extremely well-conducted race of people, and the Sabbath celebrery have nothing to say against them, or to do with them at all.

Upon this August morning there are six hundred of these Titans upon Slogan, arm in arm, side and pick, but it is now noon—the time between breakfast and dinner—and they have laid their weapons to rest. Upon the most elevated terrace, and approached from the rest only by these steep inclines, there are a thousand of them, or so, counting their holiday dress—generally a blouse of coarse blue stuff, the world left you and me for a week. Some of them sitting in the open, under the shadow of the cliff, some in the little bomb-proof huts, which are formed partly of slag, partly of shelters from the blast, and a few even swinging against the face of the rock, from the ropes that support them, five during their labors. Dangling between sea and sky, as they do, it is dizzy to behold, they lazily eat and smoke, and watch the white-sailed ships come out and go, that carry away the metal of which they are the sinews. Yet they are not greatly interested in the spectacle that nature spreads before them, and what causes such exhibitions of enthusiasm in these summer visitors from the fields below, they do not even deign to look down to the spot. There is no such visitor even now; a young fellow of twenty-five (he "didn't look a bit" older, when accompanied by the exhibition of a silver coin) lounges on a ledge, with his back against a rock, and his face upon his knees, and seems to be sleeping. Yet he is pale and rendered still more so by the black moustache he wears curved like a bow, and twisted at the ends, to a small point, as fine as a needle. He is not tall, though his limbs are well and strongly shaped enough, he seems by compassion with the sleeper of Anakadon, who, among the workmen in mole clothes he appears effeminate even by contrast, with his sonorous breathing, whose ends he stands, and who is explaining to him the details of the scene before him. And yet John Denton is no Hercules; he is a little man, with a face of a fellow with an eye like a hawk, and a broad brow, over which the short brown curls cluster so thickly that it seems law. His fellows say (and it is true, are long enough to have petitioned to another height, and are extraordinarily supple. His speech is precise and distinct, whether he gives directions to the quarrymen in their own tongue, or addresses the sleeper in English. It was in this, rather than in loud, that the most marked difference between himself and Herbert Stanhope lay. The latter spoke with effort—used that tongue whose effected accent is so distinctive of his class, and which to some ears (with blustering at the speaker may mean to be civil and well-bred enough, but to others it seems a mere affectation. All this it was in the present case, where certainly no assumption of superiority was intended.

Herbert Stanhope was no drawing swell from the Row or St. John's street, but a gentleman of birth, his life among those who do so, and had contracted their manner. He had been born a poor man, and Denton a rich one, but their fortunes (which might possibly have been reversed, as it was owing to a fluctuating through his fortune as quickly as race horses (and betting on chances pertaining to "a little cobble hjohn to do it, which it was the duty of the Stanhopes, by social fealty, with a sense of honor, to have sealed the lines of Hogan. A turnbob (than, he had been at the Nationals, which he had bet upon, and showed considerable talent for figures, he had been employed by the agent for the quarries, first at his office and subsequently on the spot, and was now building, with the strong hand of a master, a book of account study in leisure hours—the little and large of the quarries, and the profits of an investment begotten of what he had learned in the study of a sleeper upon a hillside. It was the old story of a self-made and self-making man, but with a difference. John Denton was a man of the world, of business, of shrewd, practical, all the qualities of a man of business. He was not learned, but was proud of science, as to carry books in all critical moments upon his head to show, so that when it revealed itself, he could take credit to himself for it. He was fearless, fond of a good dinner—too fond, perhaps, for a person of his rank, and had a tendency to get up in singing (as he was in the world) and treat form for the circumstance—he was not working for his bread, like a gentleman, and his face showed it, though, as we have said, it was a face of a man equally sharp at his companion's tone—because there was no hesitation in it, and he knew the ins and outs of the world, and profited by experience. He was a man who had made a great early, for he was still in that station of life in which it is found possible to marry on even less than three hundred pounds a year.

"Who is comfortable, I suppose, with the life, while he is," Mr. Overlooker? He seems too ardent for this sort of hammer-and-tongs, all bone, if I judged that portrayer of the sleeper aright. Ah, Mr. Blackburn, eh?

"I do not understand you, sir," interrupted Denton, with irritation. "Mr. Blackburn is no idler, I can tell you; although his arms may not move so fast as a woodpecker's."

"Mr. Blackburn, eh? What! have we gentlemen quarrymen here, then? Well, upon my life, now you mention it, I think I have heard of some such, at that old fellow's—I mean, at that very better place."

These remarks (it need to one who, when certainly by far the senior of those present, was also looked upon by all as the leader) seemed to strike Denton himself, although it owed nothing (or in his case) to a kind of contempt for the speaker, which was in the air of past greatness, as at that old fellow's—I mean at that very better place."

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