



## CHAPTER I

Mr. Osbaldistone, a wealthy merchant of London, had a son Francis, familiarly called Frank, who, he desired, should succeed him as the head of the mercantile house of the firm of Osbaldistone and Tresham. Accordingly, when Frank was about sixteen he sent him to a favoured French correspondent of the mercantile house, by name Monsieur Dubourg, of Bordeaux, in the south of France. Here the young man was to pursue a course of commercial studies under the direction of Mr. Dubourg. Frank remained in Bordeaux some four years, giving a fair portion of his time to those commercial subjects which his father had so much desired he should thoroughly acquaint himself with. But during this period he also developed a great fondness for literature and classical studies, spending many hours in scribbling verses, even filling his journal of commercial notes, which his father had desired him to keep,

with scribbled poems or translations of classical bits that particularly appealed to the fancy of the youthful poet. Thus he spent the time, devoting himself to the studies requisite for preparation for an ambitious and successful mercantile career less than his businesslike parent would have desired.

As he was in his early twentieth he received a letter from Mr. Osbaldistone informing him of his proposal to give him a position in the London house, preparing him to take the lead of the business when he would be able to do so no longer. To this letter Frank replied that he had strong objection to adopting a mercantile life as a profession. Soon after this displeasing answer had been forwarded to his father, he received a message from him requesting his immediate return to London. Thus his four years' life in France came to an abrupt end.

Upon Frank's arrival in London he was greeted kindly by his father, and with a timid and suppressed affection by Mr. Owen, the head clerk of the great house of Osbaldistone and Tresham. At dinner Mr. Osbaldistone carefully questioned his son as to the condition of commerce in France, thinking in this way to discover how much commercial knowledge and aptitude he had acquired from his four years' study with Mr. Dubourg. Frank, disclosing by his answers his lack of interest and observation in matters of business, increased his father's displeasure until it reached its culmination, when, upon examining his son's journal of commercial notes, he came upon a poem 'To the Memory of Edward the Black Prince'. A few more words passed on the point of Frank's refusal to adopt the mercantile profession, with the



result that in a month Frank was to give his final answer on this important subject.

The time of probation passed slowly. Frank devoted himself to his favourite verse-writing, while Mr. Owen vainly endeavored to dissuade his young friend from a line of conduct so displeasing to Mr. Osbaldistone and certain to result in the son's disinheritance. Frank, however, having a goodly share of his father's resolute and more or less obstinate disposition, at the end of the month firmly declined the proposal his father had made to him. Thereupon Mr. Osbaldistone dismissed him, with the following directions:

"You will instantly set out for the north of England to pay your uncle a visit and see the state of his family. I have chosen from among his sons (he has six, I believe) one who, I understand, is most worthy to fill the place I intended for you in the counting house. But some further arrangements may be necessary, and for these your presence may be requisite. You shall have further instructions at Osbaldistone Hall, where you will please to remain until you hear from me. Everything will be ready for your departure tomorrow morning."

Accordingly, on the next day, at five o'clock in the morning, Frank was on his way to York. He had a feeling of independence and pleasure in his journey, despite the unpleasant cause of it. He found the road, however, lacking in interest, and found amusement only in the people he encountered on the way.

One such person was a man with whom he travelled a day and a half. He too travelled on

horseback, carrying a heavy portmanteau. He was of a wary and suspicious nature, never revealing too much about what he carried, where he was going, or even the direction of his travel.

He was in such a mood that Frank started a conversation on the comparative strength and activity of their horses, which took a turn little calculated to reduce the fears of his nervous friend.

"Oh, sir," said his companion, "for the gallop I grant you; but allow me to say, your horse has too little bone to be a good roadster. The trot, sir" (striking his Bucephalus with his spurs) - "the trot is the true pace for a hackney, and were we near a town I should like to try that daisy-cutter of yours upon a piece of level road for a quart of claret at the next inn."

"Content, sir," replied Frank, "and here is a stretch of ground very favorable."

"Hem, ahem!" answered his friend with hesitation; "I make it a rule of travelling never to blow my horse between stages; one never knows what occasion he may have to put him to his mettle; and besides, sir, when I said I would match you, I meant with even weight; you ride four stone lighter than I."

"Very well; but I am content to carry weight. Pray, what may that portmanteau of yours weigh?"

"My p-p-portmanteau?" replied he, hesitating. "Oh, just a few shirts and stockings."

"I should think it heavier from its appearance. I'll hold you to the quart of claret it makes the odds between our weights."