

**THE SQUIRE. IN
TWO
VOLUMES. VOL. I**

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The Squire. In Two Volumes. Vol. I by Ellen Pickering

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ELLEN PICKERING

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THE SQUIRE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE HEIRESS," "AGNES SEARLE," &c.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

Pickering, Allen

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THE SQUIRE.

CHAPTER I.

It was a dull November afternoon. The mist hung heavily on the distant hills and above the intervening hollows. The sun, sinking in the west, lent no glory to the closing day, but seemed creeping to its rest in gloom and heaviness, as if ashamed that its might had not dispelled the fog—that its noon-day splendour had been obscured. No wonder that it hid its face! the vanquished do not like to be looked on! and there cannot be even the semblance of glory in being conquered by a fog. The present defeat resembled genius overthrown by stupidity!—borne down by the mere dull, animal weight of wealth! No wonder that the sun crept to its rest with a stealthy step and shrouded face! If it could not conquer in the heyday of its might, its only wisdom was to retire as speedily and quietly as the laws of nature would admit. That noxious vapours should have the power to darken brightness! It is sad, but very true. Only Chinese pictures have no shade; and though they may be "*selon la fantaisie*,"—that is, Chinese "*fantaisie*,"—they

are certainly not "*selon la nature*,"—that is, English nature.

Not that those who discriminate the weather closely, and affect accuracy in the description of its various varieties, would have pronounced it to be a fog: they would only have declared it to be a misty day, leaving it to the less cautious or more impatient to add, dull, heavy, chilling, and unbearable.

Dull, heavy, chilling, it certainly was, though not unbearable; such things have been borne before—must be borne again; but to my judgment, (and I rather pique myself on its correctness—who does not?) it was more dull, more heavy, more chilling, than would have been a dense, unlightless fog. There is something partaking of the sublime in a real fog. When nothing can be seen, all things may be imagined: beauties and defects—the grandeur of nature, the littleness of the art—the striking outlines of the uncultivated mountain, the petty details of this work-a-day world, are all hidden from our view; the blind and the seeing, the observing and the heedless, are brought nearly on a level: none can distinguish more than ten yards in advance, and man sees (pardon the Irishism) how narrow and bounded are his views: It seems as though his mortal course was run, and he had gained nothing by his toil and trouble. He looks back: all is objectless, obscure; there is no vestige of his labours gleaming through the mist—his very steps untraced upon the earth. The monument erected to his sorrows, and the triumphal arch to his glories, are alike lost in the gloom. His joys and his griefs have left no trace: he has felt—he has laughed—he has mourned: perhaps he had wealth—had genius—had dominion—and deemed himself a glorious being! Where are the trophies of his glory? They are hidden from his view; his gaze cannot pierce the gloom: there are no visible proofs of his triumphs; they are as nothing in the eyes of others—even his own eye cannot mark them. He learns a juster estimate of himself—he forms a truer judgment of his deeds.—He looks before: how bounded is his view! He cannot pierce the gloom—he cannot see into the future—he trembles at its unseen perils. Wo to him who would trace its obscurity without a safer guide than man's unaided reason!

The history of his own past is traced on memory's roll—

the characters cannot be obliterated; but the tale is lost to others—unknown to multitudes, as the past history of those countless crowds is lost—unknown to him. The grosser part of his nature receives a shock to its pride, and he better understands his worth in the universe—his comparative relation to the Unseen and Infinite. Yet the veil of the past shall be withdrawn—the deeds of each stand clearly forth—man's most secret thoughts be bared to the gaze of the countless hosts marshalled before the eternal throne for judgment; he shall hear his doom, whilst applauding crowds proclaim the sentence just,—the righteous award of One who has said he will judge man by his acts, whether they be good or whether they be evil, and who has promised that none shall be lost but those who will not come to him. The evil of the hereafter rests justly on man's own head. Let us think of this in the early dawn—at the sunset hour—in the noon-day glow and the midnight gloom—in joy and in sorrow—in sickness and in health—in low estate and in lofty rank.

The veil of the future, too, will be withdrawn, though mortal eye cannot pierce it now. Those splendours too dazzling for our gaze, too glorious for our comprehension, will then be revealed,—the mysteries of our heavenly Father's love be then made plain; and they who have, even here, seen something of its beauty and its power, through faith and hope, will then rejoice and adore.

Was ever fog so moralized upon before!—we imagine not. This is an age of wonders: the dull may see nothing in a fog but a fog, (for the race of non-seers is numerous;) the anticipative and impatient, only a very disagreeable check to some pleasureable excursion. Now, a fog is frequently disappointing, rarely agreeable; yet do we maintain that a real, sightless, *bona fide* fog—such as may be seen, perhaps, once in a winter, (once is quite often enough,) has some touch of the sublime.

But, we repeat, it was not a fog this sixth day of November 177-. The murky sky, the heavy mist, hanging about on hill and valley, hinted that it might have been a fog in the morning—that it might be a fog again at night; but a fog—that is, a sublime fog—at that moment it certainly was not. Objects could be distinguished near, and even in the distance, though not clearly: it was neither all gloom nor

all shine; in fact, it had no affinity with the latter; and to say that it was neither wet nor dark, was the utmost the most courteous could report in its favour. If one was neither afraid of being drenched nor benighted, at least there was no beauty, no variety of colouring, no changing and striking lights to awaken admiration. There was no break in the heavens—no lights on the earth; the forms that were visible were indistinct—traced, as it seemed, with the timid and confused touch of a beginner.

Had a landscape-painter (unable to depict the human form) wished to image stupidity and weariness in a representation of soulless nature, here was the model to his hand. You could not even hope that a ray from genius might enlighten the uniform dulness:—you might believe it had tried, and failed. The heaviness seemed determined: there was no room for speculation on the subject; there it was, and the conviction was forced upon you that there it would be:—you might almost imagine it eternal. Nature seemed out of humour,—not in a rage, (that partakes of the sublime,)—not even petulant, (that promises change,)—but sullen.

The thermometer would not have justified a very violent declamation against the cold, or a smothering quantity of furs; but the heart felt it was cold,—very cold,—chilling, benumbing; not so absolutely freezing as to command a bold effort to bear it,—that would have caused a little excitement, (petty vexations, winning little glory for their well-bearing, are rarely well borne;) but the air seemed chilling, paralyzing the fancy with its torpid touch, painting the future in gloom to the mental eye as the surrounding landscape was already painted to the bodily: in short, it was one of those days on which one feels wretched—wretched without a hope of relief,—without the power to avert the doom, or lighten its cruelty. The best remedy for such a tyranny is to sleep, if you can;—at least so seemed to think one of the occupants of the travelling-chaise winding slowly up a dreary hill in a thinly inhabited part of an inland county. Snuggled up in one corner, his hat laid aside that his head might rest more comfortably against the cushioned back, his fair, handsome, open countenance, occasionally twitched into slight contortions with the vagaries of sleep, and entirely heedless of his young companion, cuddled up in the other corner, reclined Philip Conyers, called by the villagers

"The Squire;" by his friends, (enemies he had none, or so he thought,) "Honest Phil Conyers,"—the kindest hearted and the most hospitable host, the hardest drinker, the most daring rider, the most generous and unsuspecting of men, though withal a little quick at times: but then the breeze was over on the instant, and the bosom as unruffled as before.

It was the very last sort of day to choose for returning home,—all looking so dull and heavy might induce a fancy of not being welcome; but Philip Conyers had no fancy, and paid little heed to the gloom: it had only made him sleepy. Not so his gentle companion: she had seen little notable in reality,—her years had been few. Life might be said to her to be all fancy, and she felt as if she were unwelcome: un sympathized with, she undoubtedly was. She bent forward, looked on the handsome and prepossessing features of the sleeper, so indicative of his frank and generous temper, then with a sigh slunk more closely into the corner, and forgot the present whilst dwelling on the past.

"Tally ho! hark forward!" shouted the squire, with a view-holla that must have awakened the seven sleepers of the Eastern tale, (if any thing could,) starting from his uneasy slumber, and dashing down the side glass to look out, regardless of the cold raw air, or the alarm and surprise of his timid daughter.

Ear and eye were exercised in vain; he heard only the creaking of the wheels as the carriage was slowly dragged up the wearying hill,—saw only the difficult ascent before him.

"Did not you hear the bounds, Mabel?" he inquired, turning to his gentle child, who had not recovered from the effects of his sudden burst and startling holla.

"No, sir," replied Mabel in a voice tremulous from emotion.

Her father looked at her for an instant, and out again on the dull hill; then pulling up the glass as hastily as he had dashed it down, muttered something of his having dreamt,—for it was no hunting day,—adding, as some sort of apology for his slumber, that he felt heavy, not being used to a carriage, striving at the same time to keep his eyes open, in which with great difficulty he succeeded. His companion made no reply, his words requiring none, and there was si-