

**THRALDOM**

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Thraldom by Julian Sturgis

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BY

JULIAN STURGIS

AUTHOR OF

"JOHN MAIDMENT," "AN ACCOMPLISHED GENTLEMAN," ETC.

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## CHAPTER I.

THE sun was shining brightly on a frosty morning when young Tom Fane, son of old Tom Fane, stepped gaily on his way to Goring House. The Fanes had always been hunting people, and young Tom had grumbled, as in duty bound, at the frost which hindered foxes from the performance of their stimulating duties. But the sun was so bright, the air so keen, and the good road so firm beneath his feet, that it was as hard for the young man to feel discontent with his life as to stop the blood which ran livelier in

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his veins. Indeed it is not given to everyone to be a boy of two-and-twenty, to have neither debts in the past nor doubts of the future, to be a good fellow and to know it, and to be happy in his first love. Generous, truthful, and sensible, this young man was happy in the possession of faults which some people liked, and almost everyone would pardon. He was over-sanguine and quick-tempered, and inclined to be intolerant of those of his contemporaries who had not been at Eton or in his set at Oxford. Tom had been at Eton and Oxford, and had passed through both educational establishments with the affection of many friends and the approval of his instructors, though neither the Thames at Eton nor the Isis at Oxford had been left in flames behind him. He was one of those well-balanced lads who set old gentlemen quoting their well-used Latin about the sound mind in the sound body, and who inspired

those words—which it is likely that the Great Duke never said—about the Eton Playing Fields and the Battle of Waterloo. He had lived in a rather narrow world, wherein all the boys, or men, wore the same sort of collars. All good things had come to him a little too easily; and finding that he succeeded without difficulty, and deciding that he was cleverer than most of his mates, he expected much, was impatient of delay, and had small doubt of the success of his love. Was he not all which even a doting parent could demand for his daughter? Active and healthy, sensible and popular, only son of old Tom Fane, who had inherited a fine property from other Tom Fanes, who had been old and young in the county before him, he swung his stick and whistled on his way, as he stepped to Goring House, where dwelt the girl of his heart, who was to be so glad of his wooing.

But young Tom Fane was not going to woo on that morning. His lips would smile of themselves, when he was not whistling, for he was on a romantic pilgrimage, and it seemed comical to him that he yielded to romance. He laughed at himself, and liked himself the better for indulgence in this sentiment. He was not ashamed of it, for after all there had been no hunting for a week past, and a man might as well walk to Goring House as sit at home doing nothing; and Sibyl was a fair enough excuse for the folly of any youth, however sensible—the flower-like maiden, so delicately cultivated, so formed by nature and by education to charm the bold confident lad, who found an unsuspected chivalry within him, and a gentler voice in her presence. He had sworn to himself, many times in many days, that he would win this girl, guard her from every possible danger and difficulty, however slight,