

**THE MASTER OF THE  
CEREMONIES, A  
NOVEL, IN THREE  
VOLUMES, VOL. I**

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The master of the ceremonies, a novel, in three volumes, Vol. I by George Manville Fenn

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**GEORGE MANVILLE FENN**

**THE MASTER OF THE  
CEREMONIES, A  
NOVEL, IN THREE  
VOLUMES, VOL. I**



THE  
MASTER OF THE CEREMONIES.

A Novel.

BY  
GEORGE MANVILLE FENN,  
AUTHOR OF 'DOUBLE CUNNING,' 'THE PARSON O' DUMFORD,' ETC., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE  
MASTER OF THE CEREMONIES.

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CHAPTER I.

HIS HOUSE.

EARLY morning at Saltinville, with the tide down, and the calm sea shimmering like damasked and deadened silver in the sunshine. Here and there a lugger was ashore, delivering its take of iris-hued mackerel to cart and basket, as a busy throng stood round, some upon the sands, some knee-deep in water, and all eager to obtain a portion of the fresh fish that fetched so good a price amongst the visitors to the town.

The trawler was coming in, too, with its freight of fine thick soles and turbot, with a few gaily-scaled red mullet; and perhaps a staring-eyed John Dory or two, from the trammel net set overnight amongst the rocks: all choice fish, these, to be bought up ready for royal and noble use,

for London would see no scale of any of the fish caught that night.

The unclouded sun flashed from the windows of the houses on the cliff, giving them vivid colours that the decorator had spared, and lighting up the downs beyond, so that from the sea Saltinville looked a very picture of all that was peaceful and bright. There were no huge stucco palaces to mar the landscape, for all was modest as to architecture, and as fresh as green and stone-coloured paint applied to window-frame, veranda and shutter could make it. Flowers of variety were not plentiful, but great clusters of orange marigolds flourished bravely, and, with broad-disked sunflowers, did no little towards giving warmth of colour to the place. There had been no storms of late—no windy nights when the spray was torn from the tops of waves to fly in showers over the houses, and beat the window-panes, crusting them afterwards with a coat of dingy salt. The windows, then, were flashing in the sun; but all the same, by six o'clock, Isaac Monkley, the valet, body-servant, and footman-in-ordinary to Stuart Denville, Esquire, M.C., was busy, dressed in a striped jacket, and standing on the very top of a pair of steps, cloth in one hand and wash-leather in the other, carefully cleaning windows that were already spotless. For there was something in the exterior of the M.C.'s house that suggested its tenant. Paint, glass, walls, and doorstep were so scrupu-

lously clean that they recalled the master's face, and seemed to have been clean-shaven but an hour before.

Isaac was not alone in his task, for, neat in a print dress and snowy cap, Eliza, the housemaid, was standing on a chair within; and as they cleaned the windows in concert, they courted in a special way.

There is no accounting for the pleasure people find in very ordinary ways. Isaac and Eliza found theirs in making the glass so clear that they could smile softly at each other without let or hindrance produced by smear or speck in any single pane. Their hands, too, were kept in contact, saving for cloth and glass, and moved in unison, describing circles and a variety of other figures, going into the corners together, changing from cloth to wash-leather, and moving, as it were, by one set of muscles till the task was concluded with a chaste salute—a kiss through the glass.

Meanwhile, anyone curious about the house would, if he had raised his eyes, have seen that one of the upstairs windows had a perfect screen of flowers, that grew from a broad, green box along the sill. Sweet peas clustered, roses bloomed, geraniums dotted it with brilliant tiny pointless stars of scarlet, and at one side there was a string that ran up from a peg to a nail, hammered, unknown to the M.C., into the wall. That peg was an old tooth-brush handle, and the nail had been driven in with the back of a hair-brush; but bone handle and string were invisible now,