

**ALAN DERING. IN
TWO
VOLUMES. VOL. I**

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Alan Dering. In two volumes. Vol. I by Mrs. Fetherstonhaugh

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MRS. FETHERSTONHAUGH

**ALAN DERING. IN
TWO
VOLUMES. VOL. I**

ALAN DERING.

BY

HON. MRS. FETHERSTONHAUGH,

AUTHOR OF "KILCORRAN," "KINGSdene," "ROBIN ADAIR."

"Rather the ground that's deep enough for graves,
Rather the stream that's strong enough for waves,
Than the loose sandy drift
Whose shifting surface cherishes no seed,
Either of any flower or any weed,
Whichever way it shift."

OWEN MEREDITH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,
NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1880.

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CONTENTS OF VOL. I.



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CHAPTER	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	1
I. GRAHAMSTOWN	11
II. ALAN DERING	27
III. LORD ERCILDOUN'S DAUGHTER ...	41
IV. EUCHARIS LILIES	55
V. MON RÊVE	78
VI. ICHABOD	94
VII. LADY HELÈNE	113
VIII. MISERERE DOMINE	136
IX. WHAT IS FATE?	148
X. TIME TRIETH TROTH	167
XI. A WOMAN'S NAY	180
XII. BRIGHTON	197
XIII. MADGE LEE	215
XIV. BROWN EYES	229
XV. BLUE EYES	243

ALAN DERING.



INTRODUCTION.

It was late on a summer afternoon, and a hot June sun was blazing down on the long and dusty highway, which would, about a mile on, lead into the neighbouring county town of Heversham. At this point of the road a massive stone archway marked the turning off of a side way into the beautiful park of Beechwarden, and it now gave its cool and welcome shelter to a tired little figure crouching under its shadow, and listening dreamily to the whispering sighs which rustled

through the branches of the grand old beech trees surrounding her, and from which the place had taken its name.

A sunburnt, dark-eyed little gipsy girl was this, apparently; her clothes were coarse and woefully tattered, but clean; and the battered straw hat, which sat with such a rakish cock on one side of her unkempt head, had evidently seen better days ere it wandered through sunshine, storm, and rain, with this little wanderer of the earth, "homeless, ragged, and tanned."

The arms of the stately Dumaresques, and still prouder Derings, looked down from the old grey archway in haughty contempt on this presumptuous waif and stray, which dared to lean its weary head against their cold magnificence; but the child was content, and recked little of aught else in the world so long as it

could rest its tired limbs until the sun's rays had lessened somewhat at least in intensity.

With her knees drawn up to her chin, and her small brown hands clasped round the former, she sat staring intently at a large white placard which some bill-poster had stuck upon a wooden shed opposite to her. Slowly she spelt out the announcement that the "world-renowned circus of Messrs. Pantaloni would appear at Heversham for that night only," and laboriously her eyes travelled steadily down the list of attractions set forth on the programme until they reached a line which contained only five words: "First appearance of little Madge."

The red blood rushed into the weary little face, the dark eyes flashed fire, and as the child's hands unclasped themselves

from her knees, and she rose with a vague feeling of astonishment to approach nearer the object of her interest, a proud murmur of "That's my name!" burst forth from her lips.

She too had her stake in the world now; she too might play out her little play on its great stage, as well as those many other actors and actresses which already jostled each other day and night upon it. And Madge raised her sunburnt head with childish pride, nodding contemptuously back at the grim and stately coats of arms which had seemed to deride her; and, with a murmur of "the good time 'll come yet, maybe," she resumed her way once more with sturdy little steps towards the town, where already the "Company" of which Messrs. Pantaloni's circus consisted had arrived and taken up its quarters, and were preparing

all things for a great entertainment to be given that evening, under the patronage of the nearest magnate, Mr. Dumaresque, of Beechwarden.

And as the child passed from out the shadow into the sunlight again, the grand old beech trees waved their green branches softly to and fro, seeming to say, "God speed, God speed!" to the weary little wayfarer as she left their cool refreshing shade and wandered out into the hot and dusty world once more.

* * * * *

Six hours later, and the brilliantly illuminated circus is crowded. The manager, taking a surreptitious view of the audience, smiles complacently as he watches the seats filling steadily, and glances with much satisfaction at certain "reserved seats" on the right, which had