

**STONEDELL LODGE.
A NOVEL, IN THREE
VOLUMES. VOL. I**

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Stonedell Lodge. A novel, in three volumes. Vol. I by Frederick Spencer Bird

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FREDERICK SPENCER BIRD

**STONEDELL LODGE.
A NOVEL, IN THREE
VOLUMES. VOL. I**

STONEDELL LODGE.

A Novel.

BY
FREDERICK SPENCER BIRD,
AUTHOR OF "HARRINGTON."

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. I.



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CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

BOOK I.

USURPATION.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE BELLE OF BAGSLEY - - -	1
II. THE ARTIST AND HIS BRIDE - - -	16
III. A HUSBAND'S CONFESSION - - -	32
IV. STONEBELL LODGE - - -	45
V. THE BROTHERS-IN-LAW - - -	63
VI. FATHER AND SON - - -	81
VII. THE FOSTER-PARENTS - - -	97
VIII. THE DOUBLE BEREAVEMENT - - -	113
IX. THE BARONET'S SUCCESSOR - - -	125
X. THE UNWELCOME GUEST - - -	142
XI. A STARTLING DISCOVERY - - -	159
XII. THE STRANGER - - -	172
XIII. THE PARISH CLERK - - -	190
XIV. ON THE TRACK - - -	207

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STONEDELL LODGE.

BOOK I. *USURPATION.*

CHAPTER I.

THE BELLE OF BAGSLEY.

THE morning sun was shining brightly on the grey masonry of old Bagsley church, which takes its name from the quiet little village on the outskirts of which it is situated; and the cheerful rays, passing through the chancel windows, fell on the yellow walls and white marble slabs, the old stone font, and vacant pews, making the dilapidations that time has

wrought on the interior of the building still more conspicuous to the eye of the observer.

A truly venerable pile it is, with its moss and lichen grown buttresses, partly concealed by the ivy which seems inclined to take possession of the whole building; its arched windows, here and there of painted glass; its rustic porch of time-worn oak, in places rudely carved with initials of villagers of a past generation—many of whose names appear inscribed in full by other hands on the crumbling tombstones around; and, lastly, its old belfry, surmounted by a pointed spire, in the loopholes of which, from time immemorial, jackdaws, unmolested, have built their nests, keeping proudly aloof from the inhabitants of a neighbouring rookery, and ever mingling their discordant notes with the deep cawing of their more sable brethren. A low stone wall surrounds the green and well-filled churchyard, where the lover of quaint and

curious epitaphs may, if he choose, cull a few choice specimens to add to his collection ; and at the farther extremity, a small wooden gate leads into the village of Bagsley, at the entrance of which stands the modest, low-built vicarage, with its walled-in garden abutting on the churchyard, and well-stocked with aged fruit-trees, which for many years have supplied the tables of the vicar and his predecessors with a plain but wholesome dessert, and seem still as prolific as ever.

A little farther on, there stood at the date of our story, the village hostelry, yeleft the Blue Boar ; a spacious old building, abounding with odd gables and lattice-paned windows, and having a swinging signboard over its wide doorway, through which latter, when open, a glimpse might be obtained of a leafy orchard at the back of the premises, where also were situated fragrant rick-yards, stabling, and other outbuildings—for the worthy land-