

**FATED TO BE FREE;
THREE VOLS. - III**

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Fated to be free; three vols. - III by Jean Ingelow

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JEAN INGELOW

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THREE VOLS. - III**

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By JEAN INGELOW

AUTHOR OF "OFF THE SKELDIS" ETC. ETC.

THREE VOLS.—III.

LONDON
TINSLEY BROTHERS, CATHERINE STREET
STRAND
1875

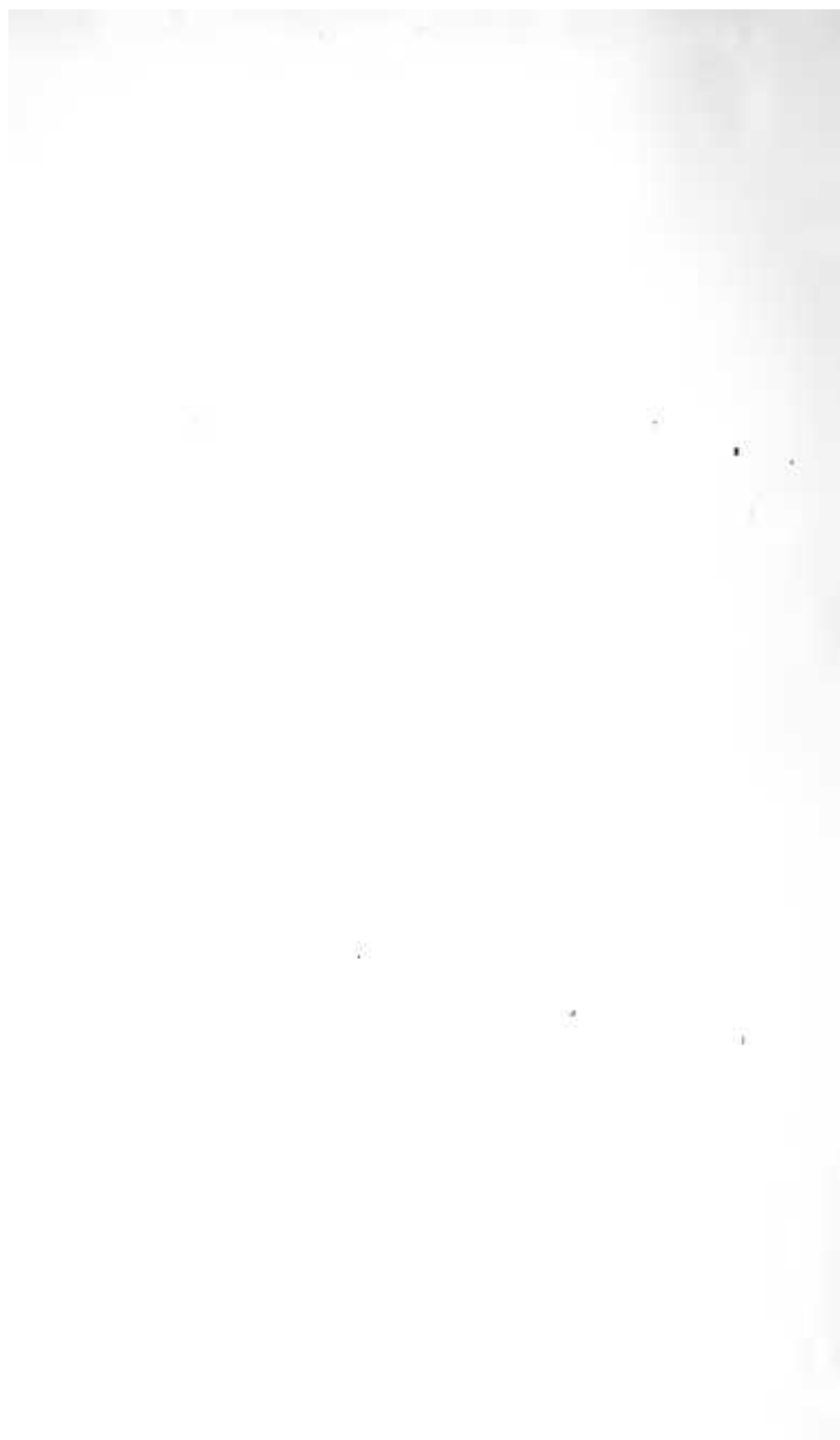
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CHAPTER I.

MRS. BRANDON ASKS A QUESTION.

"Your baby-days flowed in a much-troubled channel;
I see you as then in your impotent strife,
A tight little bundle of wailing and flannel,
Perplexed with that newly-found ferdel call'd life."
LOCKER,

JOHN MORTIMER was the last guest to make his appearance on the morning of the christening. He found the baby, who had been brought down to be admired, behaving scandalously, crying till he was crimson in the face, and declining all his aunt's loving persuasions to him to go to sleep. Emily was moving up and down the drawing-room, soothing and cherishing him in her arms, assuring him that this was his sleepy time, and shaking and patting him as is the way of those who are cunning with babies. But all was in vain. He was carried from his father's house in a storm of indignation, and from time to time he repeated his protest against things in general till the service was over.

Some of the party walked home to the house. Justina lingered, hastened, and accosted John Mortimer. But all in vain; he kept as far as possible from her, while Emily, who had gone forward, very soon found him close at her side.

"Madam," he said, "I shall have the honour of taking you in to luncheon. Did you know it?"

"No, John," she answered, laughing because he did, and feeling as if the occasion had suddenly become more festive, though she knew some explanation must be coming.

"I shall easily find an opportunity," he said, "of telling St. George what I have done. I went through the dining-room and saw the names on the plates, and I took the liberty to change one or two. You can sit by the curate at any time. In fact, I should think old friendship and a kind heart might make you prefer to sit by me. Say that they do, Mrs. Walker."

"They do," answered Emily. "But your reason, John?"

"That little creature is a match-maker. Why must she needs give me the golden head?"

"Oh, she did? Perhaps it was because she thought you would expect it."

"Expect it! *I* expect it? No; I am in the blessed case of him who expects nothing, and who therefore cannot be disappointed. I always thought you were my friends, all of you."

"So we are, John; you know we are."

"Then how can you wish such a thing for me? Emily, you cannot think how utterly tired I am of being teased about that woman—that lady. And now St. George has begun to do it. I declare, if I cannot put a stop to it in any other way, I'll do it by marrying somebody else."

"That is indeed a fearful threat, John," said Emily, "and meant, no doubt, to show that you have reached the last extremity of earnestness."

"Which is a condition you will never reach," said John, laughing, and lapsing into the old intimate fashion with her. "It is always your way to slip into things easily."

John and Emily had walked on, and believed themselves to be well in front, and out of hearing of the others; but when the right time has come for anything to be found out, what is the use of trying to keep it hidden? Justina, seeing her opportunity, went forward just as Brandon drew the rest of the

party aside to look at some rather rare ferns, whose curled-up fronds, like little crosiers, were showing on the sandy bank. She drew on, and one more step would have brought her even with them, when John Mortimer uttered the words—

“If I cannot put a stop to it in any other way, I’ll do it by marrying somebody else.”

Justina stopped and stooped instantly, as if to gather some delicate leaves of silver-weed that grew in the sand; and Emily, who had caught her step, turned for one instant, and saw her without being perceived.

Justina knew what these words meant, and stood still arranging her leaves, to let them pass on and the others come up. Soon after which they all merged into one group. John gave his arm to Mrs. Henfrey, and Emily, falling behind, began to consider how much Justina had heard, and what she would do.

Now Dorothea had said in the easiest way possible to Justina, “I shall ask our new clergyman to take Emily in to luncheon, and Mr. Mortimer to take you.” Justina knew now that the game was up; she was not quick of perception, but neither was she vacillating. When once she had decided on any