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## CHAPTER I.

THE ambiguous light of a December morning, peeping through the windows of the Holyhead mail,<sup>1</sup> enabled each of the four passengers,—who had dozed through the first seventy miles of the road, with as much comfort as the jolting of the vehicle, and an occasional admonition to remember the coachman,<sup>2</sup> (thundered through the open door, accompanied by the gentle breath of Boreas,<sup>3</sup> into the ears of the sleeping traveller,) would admit,—to observe the companions of their journey.<sup>4</sup> A lively remark, that *the day was none of the finest*, having elicited a repartee of *quite the contrary*, the various knotty points of meteorology, which usually form the exordium of an English conversation, were successively discussed and exhausted; and the ice being thus broken, the colloquy rambled to other topics, in the course of which it appeared, to the surprise of every one, that all four, though perfect strangers to each other, were actually bound to the same point, namely, Headlong Hall, the seat of the ancient and honourable family of the Headlongs, of the Vale of Llanberris, in Caernarvonshire.<sup>5</sup> This name may appear at first sight not to be truly Cambrian, like those of the Rices, and Prices, and Morgans, and Owens, and Williamses, and Evanses, and Parrys, and Joneses: but, nevertheless, the Headlongs claim to be not less genuine derivatives from the antique branch of Cadwallader<sup>6</sup> than any of the last-named multiramified<sup>7</sup> families. They claim, indeed, superior<sup>8</sup> antiquity to all of them, and even to Cadwallader himself; for, a tradition has<sup>9</sup> been handed down in Headlong Hall for some few thousand years, that the founder of the family was preserved in the deluge on the summit of Snowdon,<sup>10</sup> and took the name of Rhaiader, which signifies a *waterfall*, in consequence of his having

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accompanied the water in its descent or diminution, till he found himself comfortably seated on the rocks of Llanberris. But in later days, when commercial bagsmen<sup>11</sup> began to scour the country, the ambiguity of the sound induced his descendants to drop the suspicious denomination of *Riders*,<sup>12</sup> and translate the word into English; when, not being well pleased with the sound of the *thing*, they substituted that of the *quality*, and accordingly adopted the name *Headlong*, the appropriate epithet of waterfall.

I cannot tell how the truth may be:  
 I say the tale as 't was said to me.<sup>13</sup>

The present representative<sup>14</sup> of this ancient and dignified house, Harry Headlong, Esquire,<sup>15</sup> was, like all other Welch squires, fond of shooting, hunting, racing, drinking, and other such innocent amusements, μειζονος δ'αλλου τινος, as Menander expresses it.<sup>16</sup> But, unlike other Welch squires, he had actually suffered certain phenomena, called books, to find their way into his house; and by dint of lounging over them after dinner, on those occasions when he was compelled to take his bottle alone, he became seized with a violent passion to be thought a philosopher and man of taste; and accordingly set off on an expedition to Oxford, to inquire for other varieties of the same genera, namely, men of taste and philosophers: but, being assured by a learned Professor that there were no such things in the University, he proceeded to London, where, after beating up in several booksellers' shops, theatres, exhibition-rooms, and other resorts of literature and taste, he formed as extensive an acquaintance with philosophers and diletanti as his utmost ambition could desire; and it now became his chief wish to have them all together in Headlong Hall, arguing, over his old Port and Burgundy, the various knotty points which had puzzled his pericranium.<sup>17</sup> He had, therefore, sent them invitations in due form to pass

their Christmas at Headlong Hall; which invitations the extensive fame of his kitchen-fire had induced the greater part of them to accept; and four of the chosen guests had, from different parts of the metropolis, ensconced themselves in the four corners of the Holyhead mail.

These four persons were, Mr. Foster\*, the perfectibilian; Mr. Escot†, the deteriorationist; Mr. Jenkison‡, 18 the statu-quo-ite; 19 and the Reverend Doctor Gaster§, 20 who, though of course neither a philosopher nor a man of taste, had so won on the Squire's fancy, by a learned dissertation on the art of stuffing a turkey, that he concluded no Christmas party would be complete without him.

The conversation among these illuminati 21 soon became animated; and Mr. Foster, who, we must observe, was a thin gentleman, about thirty years of age, with an aquiline nose, black eyes, white teeth, and black hair—took occasion to panegyryze the vehicle in which they were then travelling, and observed what remarkable improvements had been made in the means of facilitating intercourse between distant parts of the kingdom: he held forth with great energy on the subject of roads and railways, canals and tunnels, manufactures and machinery: "In short," said he, "every thing we look on attests the progress of mankind in all the arts of life, and

\* Foster, quasi Φωστηρ, —from φαος and τηρεω, lucem servo, conservo, observo, custodio, —one who watches over and guards the light; a sense in which the word is often used amongst us, when we speak of *fostering* a flame.

† Escot, quasi ες σκοτον, *in tenebras*, scilicet, intuens: one who is always looking into the dark side of the question.

‡ Jenkison: This name may be derived from αιεν εξ ισων, *semper ex æqualibus*—scilicet, mensuris, omnia metiens: one who from equal measures divides and distributes all things: one who from equal measures can always produce arguments on both sides of a question, with so much nicety and exactness, as to keep the said question eternally pending, and the balance of the controversy perpetually in statu quo. By an aphæresis of the α, an elision of the second ε, and an easy and natural mutation of ξ into η, the derivation of this name proceeds according to the strictest principles of etymology: αιεν εξ ισων—Ιεν εξ ισων—Ιεν ηκ ισων—Ιεν 'η ισων—Ιενηκισων—Jenkison—Jenkison.

§ Gaster: scilicet Γαστηρ—Venter,—et præterea nihil.

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demonstrates their gradual advancement towards a state of unlimited perfection.”<sup>22</sup>

Mr. Escot, who was somewhat younger than Mr. Foster, but rather more pale and saturnine<sup>23</sup> in his aspect, here took up the thread of the discourse, observing, that the proposition just advanced seemed to him perfectly contrary to the true state of the case: “for,” said he, “these improvements, as you call them, appear to me only so many links in the great chain of corruption, which will soon fetter the whole human race in irreparable slavery and incurable wretchedness: your improvements proceed in a simple ratio, while the factitious wants and unnatural appetites they engender proceed in a compound one;<sup>24</sup> and thus one generation acquires fifty wants, and fifty means of supplying them are invented, which each in its turn engenders two new ones; so that the next generation has an hundred, the next two hundred, the next four hundred, till every human being becomes such a helpless compound of perverted inclinations, that he is altogether at the mercy of external circumstances,<sup>25</sup> loses all independence and singleness of nature,<sup>26</sup> and degenerates so rapidly from the primitive dignity of his sylvan origin, that it is scarcely possible to indulge in any other expectation, than that the whole species must at length be exterminated by its own infinite imbecility and vileness.”<sup>27</sup>

“Your opinions,” said Mr. Jenkison, a round-faced little gentleman of about forty-five, “seem to differ *toto cælo*.<sup>28</sup> I have often debated the matter in my own mind, *pro* and *con*, and have at length arrived at this conclusion, that there is not in the human race a tendency either to moral perfectibility or deterioration; but that the quantities of each are so exactly balanced by their reciprocal results, that the species, with respect to the sum of good and evil, knowledge and ignorance, happiness and misery, remains exactly and perpetually *in statu quo*.”<sup>29</sup>

“Surely,” said Mr. Foster, “you cannot maintain such a proposition in the face of evidence so luminous. Look at the progress of all the arts and sciences,—see chemistry, botany, astronomy——”

“Surely,” said Mr. Escot, “experience deposes against you. Look at the rapid growth of corruption, luxury, selfishness——”

“Really, gentlemen,” said the Reverend Doctor Gaster, after clearing the husk in his throat<sup>30</sup> with two or three hems, “this is a very sceptical, and, I must say, atheistical conversation, and I should have thought, out of respect to my cloth——”

Here the coach stopped, and the coachman opening the door, vociferated: “Breakfast, gentlemen;” a sound which so gladdened the ears of the divine, that he sprang out with so much alacrity as to sprain his ancle, and was obliged<sup>31</sup> to limp into the inn between Mr. Escot and Mr. Jenkison; the former observing, that he ought to look for nothing but evil, and, therefore, should not be surprised at this little accident; the latter remarking, that the comfort of a good breakfast and the pain of a sprained ancle pretty exactly balanced each other.