



MASTER EPHRAIM BINES, JUNIOR.

BY A NATURAL PHILOSOPHER.

EPHRAIM BINES was a jobbing gardener: an honest, hard-working, but very obstinate old fellow, and by no means sweet-tempered. His Jim Crow hat had no jauntiness in it, but brooded on his grizzled head like a rusty, draggle-tailed raven. His face was very much like a scowling knocker, and when he was in a very bad temper, he had a habit of fingering his stubbly chin, as if he were feeling for the knocker-ring. There were sullen wrinkles in his velveteen waistcoat and his corduroy breeches; his brown leather buskins frowned in every button; and his heavy, tight-laced boots descended on the earth with a solemnly slow, elephant-like thud, which seemed to say, "There, Ephraim Bines has put his foot down, and Ephraim Bines would like to see the man that could make him move it until he chooses to lift it up again."

The old ladies whose gardens he did up stood in awe of Ephraim. They durst not for their lives ask him to raise the vegetables they wanted to be raised, or to arrange their flower-beds as they wanted them to be arranged. They were obliged to be content with just such flowers, and shrubs, and fruit, and vegetables, as Ephraim chose to permit their gardens to provide them with. If interfered with in the slightest degree, Ephraim would either shoulder his tools (although half the lawn might still be unmown), and march home in a huff; or else he would take his revenge in a massacre of the innocents, ruthlessly tearing up and cutting down huge clumps of his offending employer's favourite flowers. Nothing annoyed Ephraim more than when friends of his employers made them presents of cuttings with which he was not familiar. If one of these botanical unwelcome little strangers was produced in Ephraim's presence, he would take it between his thumb and finger, hold it at arm's length as if he could not bear the smell of it, sniff contemptuously, snort indignantly, and then

unceremoniously fling the cutting over the garden wall, with the supercilious remark—"It's naught better than a stinkin', outlandish weed—that's what *that* is, mum, whoever give it to ye."

It was in vain to attempt clandestine planting of these aliens. Ephraim was sure to find them out, in whatever secluded corners they might be concealed; and then down came his hoe upon them like a headsmen's axe. Competition might have taken some of the conceit out of Master Ephraim, but there was no other jobbing gardener for three or four miles round Sloefield, and so Ephraim had completely at his mercy all the Sloefielders who owned gardens which they could not keep in order themselves.

If Ephraim gave himself such airs in other people's places, it might be supposed that he was monarch of all he surveyed in his own home. And so he was to a large extent, but still there was a tiny rebel there. Ephraim's meek-spirited little wife was dead, but whilst she lived she would scarcely have dared to say that it was hot or cold, if Ephraim had not said so before her. His eldest daughter, Jemima, who kept house for him, was almost as ill-tempered as her father, but she was afraid to vent her ill-temper upon him, saving it all for her sisters and her brother. The second daughter, Kezia, was as meek-spirited as her mother had been. The youngest, Keren-happuch, was a roguish little puss; she greatly enjoyed mischief when somebody else did it, but took precious good care not to get into a scrape herself. It was little Ephraim who was the *enfant terrible* of the family; and yet old Ephraim liked young Ephraim better than any other of his children, and got quite angry with Jemima when night after night she rushed to meet him with a fresh list of her little brother's misdeeds. She had been obliged to give up spanking him on her own account, since latterly for every spank she had received two vigorous kicks upon her