

“Well spoken!” approved Charlie, patting him on the head, “you’re a sound philosopher, my boy, and deserve every honour.”

“‘Tis not for praise, my voice I raise,” sang Charlie, “I speak only in the interests of common sense, and common necessity,” he continued in a sepulchral voice, “and I rather think Pope had the same interests at heart when he represented justice weighing solid pudding against empty praise.”

They all laughed at the extreme literalness of Archie’s interpretation, which Charlie declared would probably have afforded the great poet himself unbounded satisfaction. By this time they had made the transition from the parlour to the dining-room, where, on the table just by Minnie’s plate lay a letter, directed in a peculiar yet beautiful form of writing. Ned, in passing, was arrested by it, and lifted it the better to observe its beauty.

“Look here!” he exclaimed, “what peculiar writing—I never saw anything like this before. Did you, Charlie?”

Charlie, thus appealed to, came round to see, and started slightly when his eyes fell upon it, but quickly recovering himself, he glanced at it indifferently, and remarked that it was very pretty in a careless tone, which yet had in it an uneasy ring.

“Whose writing is it?” asked Ned, bluntly, as Minnie at last obtained possession of it after it had been criticized and admired by all in turn, with the exception of Charlie, who stood somewhat aloof, humming a tune with a strained assumption of carelessness, which was only noticed by Seymour,