

**THE STRAIGHT
ROAD IS SHORTEST
AND SUREST**

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The Straight Road is Shortest and Surest by A. L. O. E.

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The straight Road.

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IS
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BY
A. L. O. E.



LONDON:
FREDERICK WARNE AND CO.
BEDFORD STREET, COVENT GARDEN.

1886.



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THE STRAIGHT ROAD

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SHORTEST AND SUREST.

CHAPTER I.

A MISHAP IN THE WOODS.

It was a glowing, sultry day in the glorious month of June. In the drawing-room of Cortley Hall every window was thrown wide open to admit the breeze, which scarcely stirred the muslin curtains, or moved one leaf of the delicate maiden-hair fern which drooped from a fancy basket. In the deep recess of one of these windows sat a merry black-eyed girl, with a quantity of white satin ribbon heaped loosely

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upon her knee, and her workbox placed upon a little table beside her. A graceful young maiden stood near, and pensively and tenderly, as if each blossom were linked in her mind with thoughts of a home she was soon to quit, was arranging a quantity of flowers—roses, fuchsias, and geraniums—to fill a porcelain vase. Mina was less inclined to laugh and chat than was Rosa, her gay young cousin, whose tongue rattled merrily on, while her nimble fingers transformed the ribbon into piles of rosettes and favours. In the corner of the room a gentleman, not much beyond middle age, but whose broad bald forehead and “sable-silvered” hair made him seem older than he really was, was seated writing at a desk. This was Mr. Marsden, the master of Cortley Hall, and the father of Mina, the young bride-elect. He was engaged in writing orders on a munificent scale for donations to the sick and poor, on the occasion of the approaching wedding. In every cottage, for miles around,