

LUCIUS DAVOREN

OR

PUBLICANS AND SINNERS

A NOVEL.

BY

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AUTHOR OF "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," ETC.

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LUCIUS DAVOREN.

BOOK THE FIRST.

CHAPTER XIV.

Geoffrey learns the Worst.

THEY had dined, and the letter was written. A week-old moon shone in the placid heaven; the tender night-stillness had descended upon the always quiet town; lights twinkled gaily from the casements of surrounding villas; like a string of jewels gleamed the lamps of the empty High-street. The slow river wound his sinuous course between the rushes and the willows with scarce a ripple. No sweeter air could have breathed among the leaves, no calmer sky could have o'er-canopied this earth on that night in Verona when young Romeo stole into Capulet's garden under the midnight stars. It was a night made for lovers.

The clock struck the half hour after nine as Geoffrey left the hotel, with his friend's letter in his pocket; assuredly a strange hour in which to visit a lady who had forbidden him to visit her at all. But

a man who feels that he is taking a desperate step will hardly stop to consider the details of time or place which may render it a little more or less desperate.

To approach the woman he loved armed with a letter from another man; to bring a stranger's influence to bear upon her who had been deaf to his most passionate pleading; to say to her, "I myself have failed to touch your heart, but here is my bosom friend's prayer in my behalf: will you grant to his vicarious wooing the grace you have persistently denied to me?"—what could seem madder, more utterly desperate, than such a course as this?

Yet women are doubtless strange creatures—a fact which those classic poets and satirists whose opinions it had been his pleasing task to study had taken pains to impress on Mr. Hossack's mind. He remembered Mrs. Bertram's agitation in that brief scene with Lucius, her exalted sense of gratitude. It was just possible that she really might regard him, even at this hour, as the preserver of her child's life—second only to Providence in that time of trouble. And if she thought of him thus, his influence might have some weight.

"Dear old fellow!" thought Geoffrey affectionately; "he wouldn't let me see the letter. I daresay he has given me no end of a character,—like other written characters, which are generally of the florid order—