

PREFACE.

The story of My First Book is a good deal mixed, and, like many other stories, cannot be fully understood without some previous allusion to what historians call "the causes which led to it." For my first book was not my first novel, and it is the latter, I take it, not the former, that an expectant world, is anxious to hear about. I first blossomed into print with *Physiological Æsthetics* in 1877—the title alone will be enough for most people—and it was not till seven years later that I wrote and published my earliest long work of fiction, which I called *Philistia*. I wasn't born a novelist, I was only made one. Philosophy and science were the first loves of my youth. I dropped into romance as many men drop into drink, or opium-eating, or other bad practices, not of native perversity, but by pure force of circumstances. And this is how fate (or an enterprising publisher) turned me from an innocent and impecunious naturalist into a devotee of the muse of shilling shockers.

When I left Oxford in 1870, with a decent degree and nothing much else in particular to brag about, I took perforce to that refuge of the destitute, the trade of schoolmaster. To teach Latin and Greek verse at Brighton College, Cheltenham College, Reading Grammar School, successively, was the extremely uncongenial task imposed upon me by the chances of the universe. But in 1873, Providence, disguised as the Colonial Office, sent me out in