

ther sen-
worst of
at poodle,

who are
ang more
could be
res could

AN APOLOGY IN CONFIDENCE

THE present writer has a weight upon his conscience. But he has no desire to disburden himself at the expense of the future reader of his works. This is addressed solely to those whom he has acquired the right to apostrophize as "My readers"; and, indeed, properly speaking, only to such of them as were misled by a too generous appreciation of his first four novels, into purchasing his fifth. For he cannot free himself from a haunting sense that he was guilty of a gross neglect in not giving them fuller warning that the said fifth volume was not *Early Victorian*, either in style or substance.

It is well understood nowadays—and it is not for so humble an individual as the P. W. aforesaid to call in question the judgments of everybody else—that each living author, whether he be painter or writer, shall produce at suitable intervals, preferably of twelve months, a picture or volume on all fours with the work from his hand which has first attracted public attention. And the P. W. cannot conceal from himself that in publishing, without a solemn warning addressed to possible purchasers, such a novel as his last ("*An Affair of Dishonour*": Heinemann), he has run the risk of incurring the execration or forgiveness—the upshot is the same—of many of his most tolerant and patient readers, to remain on good terms with whom is, and always will be, his literary ambition.

For the "*Affair*" is certainly not an *Early Victorian* story in the ordinary sense of the words. A certain latitude has been claimed by some critics in the choice of names for the periods treated of in the other humble performances of its author; but so far no commentator has called its epoch—that of Charles II.—"*Early Victorian*." It has been spoken of freely as sixteenth and eighteenth century; but that is immaterial. In fact, it is difficult to resist the conviction that in what may be called sporting chronology—a system which seems to have a certain vogue of its own—so long as the writer says "century," one number does as well as another to make the sentence ring. The expression "*Early Victorian*,"