

PROLOGUE OF THE REPORTER.

In undertaking to give a plain and truthful account of the very startling and mysterious occurrences in our quiet little hamlet of W——e, N. Y., now known and talked about as the "Mark Ashton Mystery," I want it clearly understood that I am not obtruding my humble self among authors and writers of fiction.

Indeed, I am not the writer of the greater part of this strange history, but rather a compiler, or editor, if you will, of narratives furnished by the parties who were chief actors in the drama.

I have only undertaken the work of collecting and revising the various narratives after much solicitation on the part of public men, and after much careful self-examination of my motives and fitness for the task.

As to the accuracy of the reports of the investigations held before and after Mr. Ashton's death (?) and the accounts of those conferences among the police and detectives, where I served as official stenographer, I can testify to their absolute accuracy.

If any one questions my motives—and no doubt some will—I have the approval of my own conscience, the approbation of my wife and the endorsement of my pastor in the Chalmers Presbyterian Church, where I have been a member over thirty years. I always hold that if a man can feel his own conscience approves an enterprise, and if his wife and pastor endorse him, he is strong to face the world.

I take a humble pride in saying also that I have served for thirteen years as court stenographer and have never failed to give satisfaction.

Though not experienced in the making of books, I can truthfully claim some qualifications as a reporter, not only in giving the correct language used, but also in describing, as I have in this work, what occurs and is pertinent to the case, in the conduct and looks of the witnesses.