

PREFACE TO THE AMERICAN EDITION.

Among the works of every writer of Fiction there are generally one or two that owe their being to some haunting thought, long communed with—a thought which has at last found a living shape in some story of deed and passion.

I say one or two advisedly: for the span of man's active life is short and such haunting fancies are, of their essence, solitary. As a matter of fact, indeed, the majority of a novelist's creations belong to another class, must of necessity (if he be a prolific creator) find their conception in more sudden impulses. The great family of the "children of his brain" must be born of inspirations ever new, and in alluring freshness go forth into the world surrounded by the atmosphere of their author's present mood, decked in the colours of his latest imaginings, strengthened by his latest passional impressions and philosophical conclusions.

In the latter category the lack of long intimate acquaintance between the author and the friends or foes he depicts, is amply compensated for by the enthusiasm appertaining to new discoveries, as each character reveals itself, often in quite unforeseen manner, and the consequences of each event shape themselves inevitably and sometimes indeed almost against his will.

Although dissimilar in their genesis, both kinds of stories can, in the telling, be equally life-like and equally alluring to the reader. But what of the writer? Among his literary family is there not one nearer his heart than all the rest—