

Now, if I had published this story after a manifesto warning, cautioning, and earnestly entreating all readers who expected it to be Victorian and Suburban to keep their money in their pockets, I should not be feeling, as I do now, that the writer of the above letter had been entrapped into reading it under false pretences. I can only offer humble and heartfelt apology to the writers, English as well as American, of the many letters I have received, practically of the same tenor as the above.

But I am left in a dilemma. I cannot consider myself bound to make my next net volume exclusively Victorian, Suburban, kindly, gossipy, button-holy—I rather like that word—in the face of some very strong encouragements to have another go-in at *Barts*, or their equivalents, of evil dispositions, or, perhaps I should say, of Mediaeval dispositions; for I am countenanced by many sporting chronologists in attaching a meaning to this word at war with my boyish understanding of it, which elopped the “moyen âge” at the Reformation. However, it doesn’t matter; this is all in confidence. I cannot very well cite these encouragements. They form part of a most liberal and intelligent series of reviews—not unmixed praise by any means—which I am sticking at odd times in a big book, to which I shall have to allude more particularly presently. It is enough for us now that several of them speak of “*An Affair of Dishonour*” as its author’s best production, so far. After that I must really be Mediaeval, or *Marry-come-up*, or whatever one ought to call it, a little more. There is no way out.

A reviewer of an isolated and forcible genius also has a share in inducing me to try the same line again. I want to be reviewed by him, please, as often as possible. There is a healthy and bracing tone in his lightest word. Listen:

“A story-teller ought to be able to tell a story. There is a story in ‘*An Affair of Dishonour*,’ but I pity the reader who tries to excavate it. He must tie a wet towel round his head, and clench his teeth, and prepare to face hours of digging and scraping. And when he has excavated the story from the heavy clay of the style, he will ask why the author took so much trouble to bury it so deep in affectation. . . . Mr. De Morgan tries to copy the language of the seventeenth century, but he copies it like a schoolboy. . . . To make the mess complete, the last chapter is taken from a manuscript.

“If Mr. De Morgan desired to imitate Esmond he ought to have stuck to the Esmond method. If he wished to tell a melodramatic story he ought to have told it plainly. The story is stale. . . . I suppose the rake is meant to be a Lovelace, and Lucinda a *Clarissa Harlowe*. The whole thing is artificial, there is no illusion, and the characters are all sticks. The battle is bad, and the duels are bad, and the dialogue is very bad. And how it bores one!”