

CHAPTER XXIV

MRS. TRANT seems to have been bedridden when Mr. Absalom Price took down the following deposition, but still in full possession of her faculties. He seems not to have added a word to it beyond his note at the end. In another handwriting the actual date of her death is given, nearly two years later, so that the document has hardly the character of a death-bed confession. But if the truth of her statements had been doubted at the time, surely some word to that effect would not have been wanting.

The MS. begins abruptly, as though in answer to a question :—

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“ Ne’er a one but myself knows aught about it, Master Price, though a many know what came after. But for all that went before, and made the outcome of it, there’s no soul living can tell you a true word but I. And I’ll tell it, and stop while you write it.

“ It was in May-time that year the young Squire came to the Manor House by the sea, and rode over to the May games when I was crowned the Queen. Oh, but he was beautiful to see ! They stacked the hay early that year, but before the first cart came to the ingathering, I knew him for the liar that he was, and that all my good days were over. An old story, Master Price !

“ But no woman should ever be the worse for him, said Squire Raydon. His tenant Jonas Trant would be the better for a wife, and if he wanted one of his own choosing, let him look for another landlord. Trant got two hundred