

**DEAD LETTERS**

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Dead letters by Maurice Baring

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**MAURICE BARING**

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BY

MAURICE BARING



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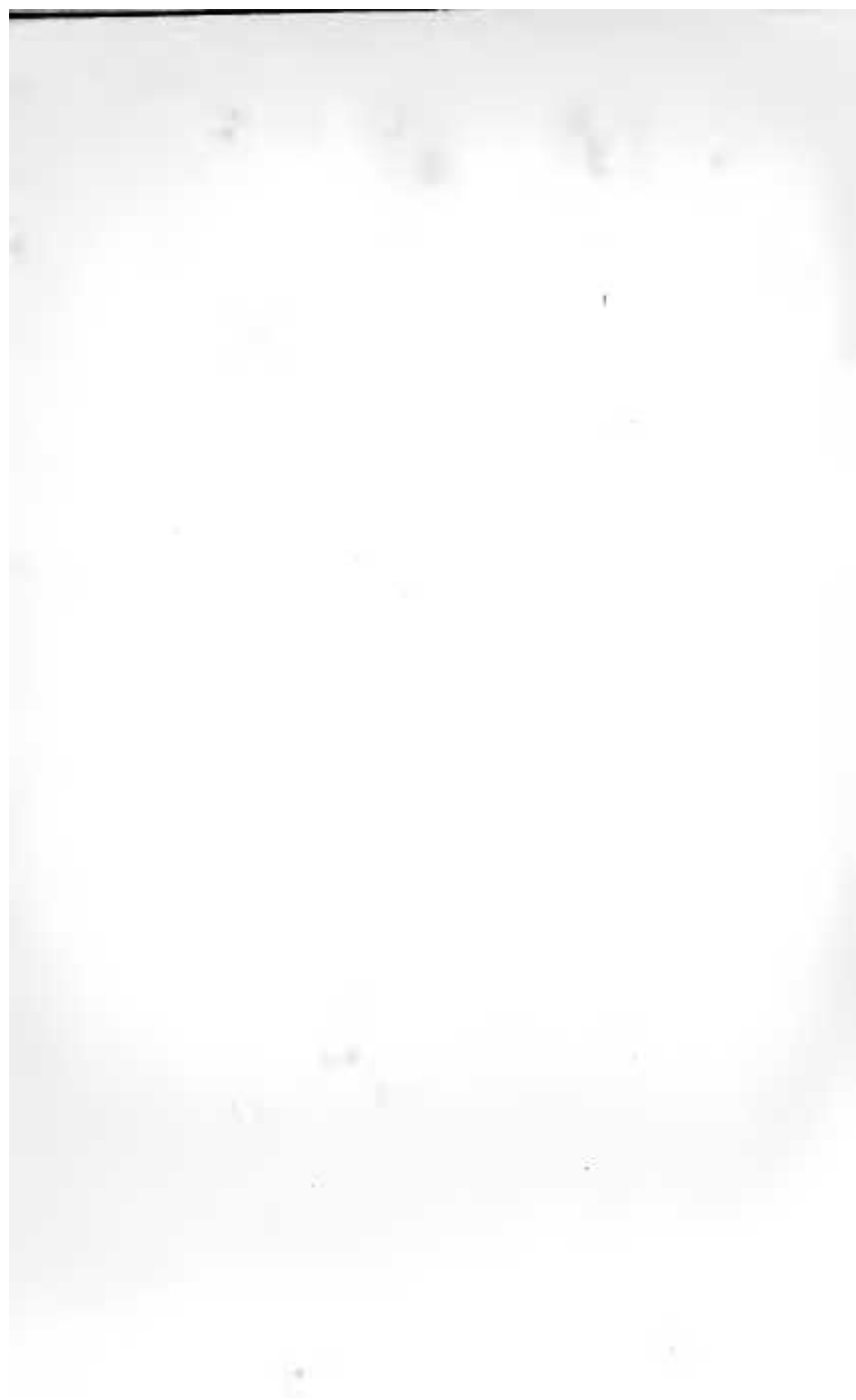
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## DEDICATION

*To Lord Lucas*

MY DEAR BRON,

I WISH to begin this bundle of "Dead Letters," collected from the Dead Letter Office of the World, with a living letter to you.

These letters are in no wise meant to be either historical documents or historical studies or aids to the understanding of history, or learning of any kind with or without tears. They are the fruits of imagination rather than of research. The word research is not even remotely applicable here, for in my case it means the hazy memories of a distant education indolently received, a few hurried references to Smith's "Classical Dictionary," a map of Rome which is in the London Library, and Bouillet's "Biographie Universelle." So that if you tell me that my account of the Carthaginian fleet is full of inaccuracies, or that the psychology of my Lesbia conflicts with the historical evidence,

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I shall be constrained to answer that I do not care. Yet amidst this chaff of fancy there are a few grains of historical truth. By historical truth I mean the recorded impressions (they may be false, of course, and the persons who recorded them may have been liars, in which case it is historical falsehood) of men on events which were contemporary with them. One of the letters is entirely composed of such grains. I will not tell you which one it is until some of our common friends, who are historical experts, have singled it out as being the one letter which oversteps all bounds of historical possibility and probability. (It is not the letter on Heine, part of the substance of which was taken from Memoirs and freely blended with fiction.) Such singling out has already occurred with regard to certain details of the letters as they appeared week by week in the "Morning Post." But I confess that I have so far suffered more from the credulity than from the scepticism of my readers, and I was tempted at one moment rather to insert the impossible than to make the possible appear probable. For correspondents wrote to me, asking me to give them from my secret store further details

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with regard to Lady Macbeth's housekeeping, Lord Bacon's business affairs, and the table talk of the Emperor Claudius.

On the other hand, a sceptic asked to be supplied with the historical evidence for Guinevere's extravagance in dress. I am conscious that in some of these letters I may have laid myself open to the charge of irreverence towards certain themes which are hallowed by romance and overshadowed by the wings of the great poets. I plead "Not guilty." I am sure that you, of all people, will acquit me; for those (such as you) whose enjoyment of the great poets is vital and whose belief in the permanence of Romance is robust are seldom offended at a levity which they have no difficulty in recognizing to be the familiarity, not breeding contempt but begotten of awe, of the True Believer, nor have they any difficulty in distinguishing such laughter from the scoff of the Infidel.

To end on a less pompous note, let me add that if you like this book that is enough for me; and the blame of the rest of the world, although it will ultimately affect my purse—and a purse, as Shakespeare says, is trash—will disturb neither my peace