

**A VALIANT IGNORANCE:  
A NOVEL. IN THREE  
VOLUMES. VOL. I**

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A Valiant Ignorance: A Novel. In Three Volumes. Vol. I by Mary Angela Dickens

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**MARY ANGELA DICKENS**

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A  
VALIANT IGNORANCE

A NOVEL

BY  
MARY ANGELA DICKENS

AUTHOR OF "CROSS CURRENTS," "A MERE CYPHER," ETC.

"Thy gold is brass!"

PRINCE HOHENSTIEL SCHWANGAU

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

London  
MACMILLAN & CO.  
AND NEW YORK

1894



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## A VALIANT IGNORANCE

### CHAPTER I

“MY DEAR MAMMA,

“I hope you are quite well. I am quite well, and Smut is quite well. Her tail is very fat. I hope papa is quite well. I have a box of soldiers. The captain has a horse. Uncle Richard gave them to me. There is a hole in the horse, and he sticks in tight. Auntie is quite well, and so is nurse, and so is cook.

“I am, your loving Son,

“JULIAN.”

It was the table d'hôte room of one of the best hotels in Nice; a large room, gay and attractive, according to its kind, as fresh paint, bright decoration, and expanse of looking-glass could make it. From end to end were ranged small tables, varying in size but

uniform in the radiant spotlessness of their white cloths, and the brightness of their silver, china, or glass; and to and fro between the tables, and from the tables to the door, moved active waiters, whose one aim in life seemed to be the anticipation of the wishes of the visitors for whose pleasure alone they apparently existed.

It was early, and *déjeuner* proper was hardly in full swing as yet. But a good many of the tables were occupied, and a subdued hum of conversation pervaded the air; a hum compounded of the high-pitched chatter of American women and the quick, eager volubility of French tongues, backed by a less pronounced but perfectly perceptible under-current of German and English; the whole diversified now and then by a light laugh.

The sounds were subdued because the room was large and sparsely filled, but they were gay. The smiling alacrity of the waiters was apparently at once a symptom of, and a subtle tribute to, the humour of the hour. There were sundry strongly-marked faces here and there among the little groups; middle-aged men to whom neither ambition



nor care could have been empty words ; middle-aged women with lines about their faces not lightly come by ; young girls with the vague desire and unrest of youth ; young men with its secrets and its aspirations. But all individuality of care, anxiety, or desire seemed to be in abeyance for the time being ; enjoyment — somewhat conventional, well-dressed enjoyment, of the kind that rather covers up trouble as not “the thing” than disperses it—was evidently the order of the day. It was within three days of the carnival, and the visitors who were crowding into Nice came one and all with fixedly and obviously light-hearted intention.

The link between the little letter—not little by any means in a material sense, since its capitals sprawled and staggered over a large sheet of foreign letter paper—and the smart, pleasure-seeking atmosphere of the Nice table d'hôte room, was a woman who sat at a little table by one of the open windows. And she was much more easily to be identified, arguing from her appearance and manner, with her present surroundings than with the images conjured up by the blotted

letter in her hand. She was a small woman, with a very erect little figure, the trimness of which was accentuated by the conventional perfection of the dress she wore; it was not such a dress as would commend itself to the fashionable woman of to-day—at that date, eighteen hundred and seventy-two, tailor-made garments for ladies were not—but it had won a glance of respect, nevertheless, from every woman in the room in the course of the few minutes which had elapsed since its wearer had entered. Her hair was fair; very plentiful and very fashionably dressed. Her eyes were blue; her colouring pale. If she had had no other claims on a critic's attention, no more marked characteristics, she might have been called rather pretty. She was rather pretty, as a matter of fact, but her prettiness was dwarfed, and put out of sight by the stronger influence of her manner and expression.

As she sat there reading her letter, neither moving nor speaking, she was stamped from head to foot—as far as externals went—as one of a type of woman which commands more superficial homage than perhaps any other—the woman of the world. The self-possession,

the quiet, unquestioning assurance, even the superficiality of her expression in its total absence of intellectuality or emotionalism, spoke to character; the narrow character, truly, which is cognisant only of shallow waters, knows them, and reigns in them. But it was a noticeable feature about her that even this character had gone to the accentuation of the type in her. As to her age, it would have been extremely difficult to guess it from her appearance. Her face was quite unworn—evidently such emotions as she had known had gone by no means deep—and yet it was not young; there was too much knowledge of the world about it for youthfulness. As a matter of fact, she was twenty-six years old. She was sitting alone at the little table by the window, and her perfect freedom from nervousness, or even consciousness of the admiring glances cast at her, emphasized her perfect self-possession.

A waiter, smiling and assiduous even beyond the smiling assiduity with which he had waited at other tables, appeared with her breakfast, and as he arranged it on the table, she replaced the blotted letter in its envelope