

**BLOTTED OUT, IN  
THREE  
VOLUMES, VOL. III**

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Blotted out, in Three Volumes, Vol. III by Annie Thomas

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**ANNIE THOMAS**

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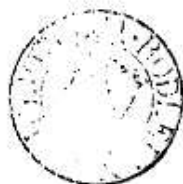
BY ANNIE THOMAS,

(Mrs. PENDER CUDLIP)

AUTHOR OF "DENIS DONNE," "CALLED TO ACCOUNT,"  
"WALTER GORING," "NO ALTERNATIVE."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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## CHAPTER I.

### NEW FRIENDS!

I FORGIVE Aunt Helen a good many of her sins against me the morning after she has made her sad disclosure to me concerning Theo, for the look of unhappiness on her face has intensified itself into one of stolid despair. I have never realized till now that any one with such a consistently good appetite and lethargic temperament as are the portions of Aunt Helen can be oppressed by any mental pain, or be the repository of such a secret as this which she is guarding. But, for all my pity for

"Torrens," Claire says bitterly. "I can't blind myself—he's been in a state of almost boisterous elation ever since he heard you were going to stay with her in Green Street. I know what he will do; he will make you his cat's-paw. You will be his excuse for going to her house and being her companion, and you're such a blind bat that she'll win him before your eyes, and you won't see it."

"I shall not see it, because she won't do it," I say confidently.

"Nonsense! She's only a woman, and she loves him. Why should she make a sacrifice for me any more than I would for her? What forces she can bring to bear upon him—beauty, money, position, breeding! You see I do her justice. She *will* turn his head. She has knowledge of the world—she has tact. If a Venus endowed with the wealth of Cræsus had entered the lists against me, and there had been the tiniest taint of vulgarity about her, I could have put it before him in a light that would have

disgusted him. But she can defy my criticism at all points—I can only hate her.”

“Perhaps he will change his mind before my visit to Mr. Macpherson is over,” I say reassuringly. I find myself drifting rapidly into the confirmed habit of buoying myself up with the hope that something will turn up to obviate impending unpleasantness.

“At any rate, discourage his visits, and let Lady Torrens see that you disapprove of them,” Claire goes on, disregarding my suggestion, which, I admit to myself, has but little sinew and strength in it. “Think of me, Tim, down here, while he’s disporting up there. I’m getting suspicious and soured, for I love him more than ever; and if I lose him, I shall marry in despair, and go to the dogs as fast I can. So think well before you fall in quietly with any one’s plans to separate us.”

I give a solemn promise that I will do anything or nothing, as the case may be; and, after the final leave-taking, I go off weighted with so many contradictory