

**A HUMAN  
DOCUMENT,  
A NOVEL**

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A human document, a novel by W. H. Mallock

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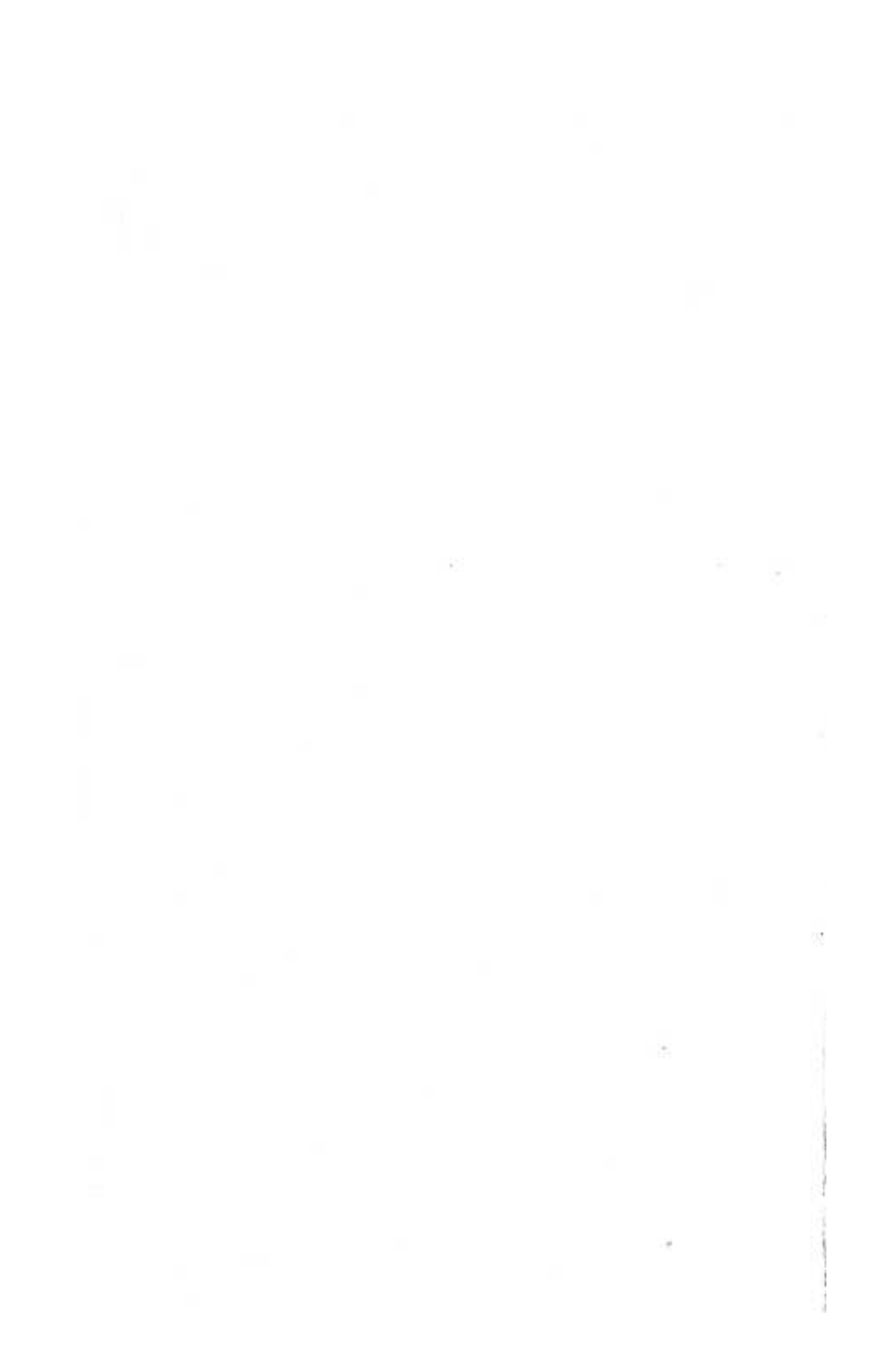
**W. H. MALLOCK**

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VOL. I.



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A HUMAN DOCUMENT

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BY

W. H. MALLOCK

*IN THREE VOLUMES*

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LONDON: CHAPMAN AND HALL, LD.

1892

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## A HUMAN DOCUMENT.

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### INTRODUCTION.

THE following work, though it has the form of a novel, yet for certain singular reasons hardly deserves the name.

I happened to be staying at a country house on the Continent a year or so after the publication of a now celebrated book. That book was the *Journal of Marie Bashkirtcheff*; and as several of the party then present were reading it, it was not unnatural that it should be continually discussed and alluded to. There was one lady, however—a Countess Z——, a Hungarian—whose interest in it



struck me as being keener than on ordinary grounds could be accounted for; and whilst sitting with her on a pleasant afternoon in a pavilion by the side of a lake, and talking idly of any triviality that suggested itself, she recurred to the subject so abruptly and with such an air of abstraction, that I felt convinced it was constantly occupying her mind. Her remark was not very striking, and it required no particular answer, so by way of showing her that I was civil enough to be attending, I gave expression to a thought which had often before occurred to me.

“What a pity,” I said, “that a woman like Marie Bashkirtcheff, with such resolute frankness, and such power of self-observation, should have died before her experiences were better worth observing. She often tells us herself that she has nothing in her life to hide. A woman who can say that has not much to reveal. It does not mean merely that she has not lived badly—it means also that she has not lived at all.”

My companion fixed her eyes on me with an odd look of inquiry.

"Do you remember this?" I went on. "There is one thing and one thing only which Marie Bashkirtcheff seems to wince at recording; and that thing, she exclaims passionately, sullied her whole life. Do you remember what it was? It was a single kiss on the forehead which she gave to an uninteresting boy. A woman who can think herself sullied by a childish trifle like that knows no more of life than a man can know of partridge-shooting who feels disgraced as a sportsman by a splash of mud on his shoe.

"Tell me," said the countess with a slight access of irony, "how deep in the mud must a woman walk before a man considers her progress interesting?"

"He doesn't want her," I said, "to walk in the mud at all. When you ask that question you are running away with a word. What he wants her to experience is not the dirt of life, but the depths. The woman we are

speaking of had only paddled in the shallows, and she thought herself drowning when a ripple broke over her ankles. I confess I am irritated by this super-sensitive delicacy; and yet, after all, it is that very quality which, if she had ever really lived, would have made her Journal such a revelation. I wish," I went on, as my thoughts more or less ran away with me, "I wish that this woman, with all her moral daintiness, had been swept off her feet by some real and serious passion. I wish that with soul and body she had gone through the storm and fire: that what she had once despised and dreaded had become the desire of her heart; and that she had found herself rejecting, like pieces of idle pedantry, the principles on which once she prided herself as being part of her nature. What an astonishment and what an instruction she would have been to herself during the process! Think how she would have felt each part of it—the degradation, the exaltation, the new weakness, the new strength, the bewilderment, the transfiguration! Could she only have known all