

**THE HANDSOME
HUMES, IN THREE
VOLUMES, VOL. I**

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The handsome Humes, In three volumes, Vol. I by William Black

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WILLIAM BLACK

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THE HANDSOME HUMES

BY
WILLIAM BLACK

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VOL. I.

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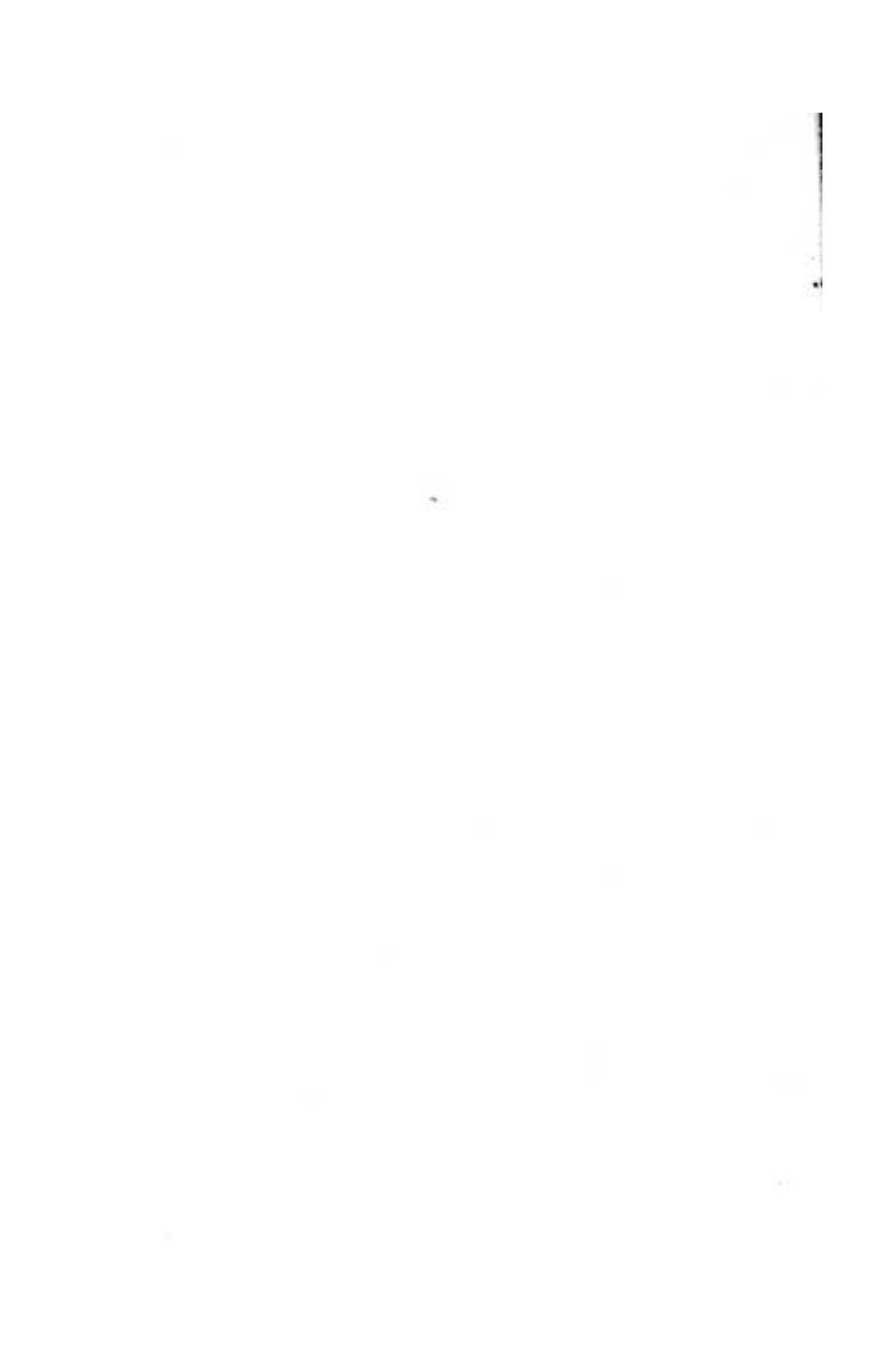
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THE HANDSOME HUMES.

CHAPTER I.

A COMING OF AGE.

ON a certain night in February a numerous and distinguished company was gradually assembling in the Marie Antoinette room of the Hôtel Métropole, Northumberland Avenue, the occasion being the coming of age of a young man called Sidney Hume. But of all the people arriving or arrived there, none presented so striking a figure as the hostess herself, a woman of quite unusual stature, straight as a wand, yet not without the presence and substantiality befitting her years, which lay between the fifties and sixties. Comely of feature, too,

with a complexion, almost countrified in its clear fresh tones, that accorded well with the silvery gray of her hair; eyes at once frank and shrewd; a mouth good-naturedly inclined to smile, and showing, when her lips parted, perfect teeth. For this stately dame—looking all the more stately because of her costume of black velvet and old lace, with an occasional gleam of diamonds—was not at all of an austere demeanour; nor yet was she blandly and passively gracious, as might fairly have become her height. The welcome that she extended to her guests had more than a touch of cheerful cordiality in it; there was a quick word here, a humorous glance there; she could maliciously laugh with this one, and instantly alter her face to receive the next—who chanced to be a bishop. Conscious of her great personal beauty, proud of her son, pleased to have her friends come round her, she appeared to be a very happy woman in these auspicious circumstances,

and she took no pains to conceal the fact. A slight insistence in her speech—a sort of persuasive downrightiness—she may have derived from her Scotch upbringing; otherwise she betrayed no trace of accent, as she chatted with this one and that, obviously in the highest of high spirits.

Meanwhile the young man whose four-and-twentieth birthday had brought these people together was also doing his part—moving about the murmuring room with a slip of names in his hand—giving whispered directions as to who was to take down whom to dinner—furnishing introductions where that was needful—and so forth. He also was tall, and of a well-built, slim figure; his face clean-shaven; his features of a distinctly intellectual cast; his brown hair worn rather long; his eyes grave and attentive; his manner somewhat reserved. He seemed inclined to listen respectfully rather than to talk, especially if the person he was addressing happened to be older