

**A FEARFUL
RESPONSIBILITY:
AND OTHER STORIES**

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A Fearful Responsibility: And Other Stories by William D. Howells

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BY

WILLIAM D. HOWELLS

AUTHOR OF "THE LADY OF THE AROOSTOOK," "THE UNDISCOVERED
COUNTRY," ETC.



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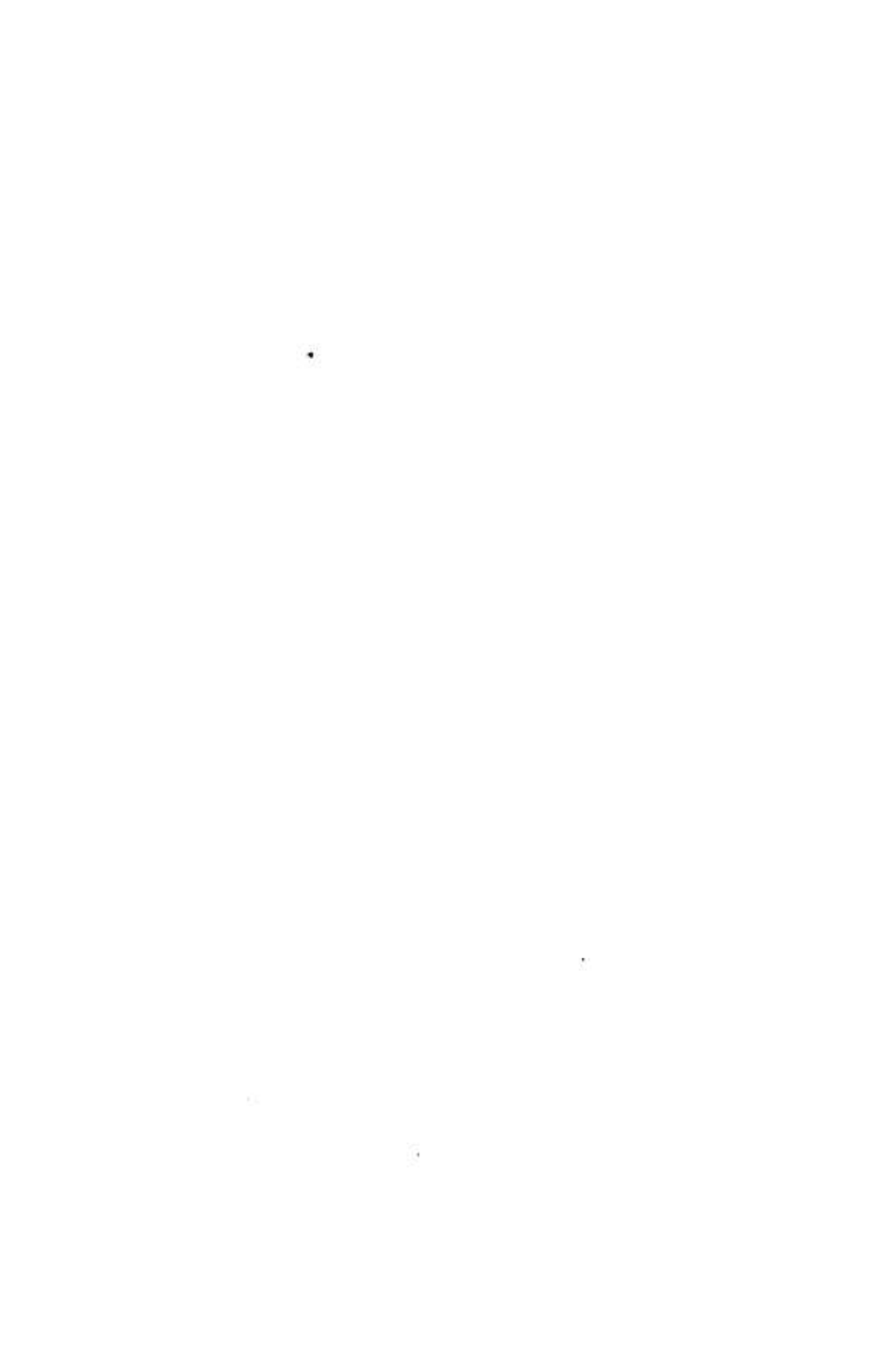
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A FEARFUL RESPONSIBILITY.

I.

EVERY loyal American who went abroad during the first years of our great war felt bound to make himself some excuse for turning his back on his country in the hour of her trouble. But when Owen Elmore sailed, no one else seemed to think that he needed excuse. All his friends said it was the best thing for him to do; that he could have leisure and quiet over there, and would be able to go on with his work.

At the risk of giving a farcical effect to my narrative, I am obliged to confess that the work of which Elmore's friends spoke was a projected history of Venice. So many literary Americans have projected such a work that it may now fairly be regarded as a national enterprise. Elmore was too obscure to have been announced in the usual way by the newspapers as having this design; but it was well known in his

town that he was collecting materials when his professorship in the small inland college with which he was connected lapsed through the enlistment of nearly all the students. The president became colonel of the college regiment; and in parting with Elmore, while their boys waited on the campus without, he had said, "Now, Elmore, you must go on with your history of Venice. Go to Venice and collect your materials on the spot. We're coming through this all right. Mr. Seward puts it at sixty days, but I'll give them six months to lay down their arms, and we shall want you back at the end of the year. Don't you have any compunctions about going. I know how you feel; but it is perfectly right for you to keep out of it. Good-by." They wrung each other's hands for the last time,—the president fell at Fort Donelson; but now Elmore followed him to the door, and when he appeared there one of the boyish captains shouted, "Three cheers for Professor Elmore!" and the president called for the tiger, and led it, whirling his cap round his head.

Elmore went back to his study, sick at heart. It grieved and vexed him that even these had not thought that he should go to the war, and that his inward struggle on that point had been idle so far as others were concerned. He had been quite earnest