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IN TWO VOLUMES.

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W O R M W O O D

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A DRAMA OF PARIS.

BY

MARIE CORELLI,

AUTHOR OF "ARDATH," "VENDETTA!" ETC. ETC.

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W O R M W O O D.

I.

I GAZED at her a moment in blank silence;—then, remembering that she, even she, was the same fair woman, who had but lately *cursed* me,—I rallied my forces and smiled a little.

“Gone!” I echoed. “*Bien!* I fail to see what difficulty you can possibly have in tracing her, mademoiselle! She has only fled to her lover!”

As I said this with freezing tranquility, Héloïse suddenly gave way, and, breaking into smothered sobbing, hid her face on my father’s arm.

“Oh, I hope,” she cried piteously. “I hope God is more merciful than man! Oh, what shall I do, what *shall* I do! My poor, poor Pauline!—alone at night in Paris!—such a little, soft, timid thing! Oh, cruel, cruel! She would never go to Silvion Guidèl, now he has become a priest—never!—and see—see, Monsieur Beauvais, what she has written here,”—

and, addressing herself to my father, she drew from her bosom a little crumpled note and unfolded it. "I had left her," she sobbed, "lying on her own bed, after we had carried her upstairs in her swoon,—and when I came back after attending to my aunt, who is very, very ill, she had gone! Her bridal dress was thrown aside,—she had not taken one of her jewels,—and I do not think she had any money. Only a little black dress and cloak and hat were missing from her wardrobe,—and this letter I found on her table. In it she says"—here Héloïse tried to master her tears, and, steadying her voice, she read—"Try to forgive me, darling Héloïse; you are so good that you will even pity those who are wicked. Never think of me again except when you say your prayers,—then ask God just once to be kind to your little Pauline."

My father's old eyes brimmed over;—*his* heart was touched, but not mine! I sat down leisurely, and looked on as unconcernedly as a cynical critic looks on at a new play.

"Poor child—poor child!" murmured my father huskily; then he turned towards me. "Have *you* nothing to say, Gaston?—no suggestion to make?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Absolutely I am powerless in the matter;" I said coldly. "I am in a very peculiar position myself,—a position which neither you nor Mademoiselle