

Uncle Silas

• J. S. Le Fanu •



Assembled
Stories



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UNCLE SILAS

A Tale of Bartram-Haugh

By

J. S. LeFanu

1899



**TO
THE RIGHT HON.**

THE COUNTESS OF GIFFORD,

**AS A TOKEN OF
RESPECT, SYMPATHY, AND ADMIRATION**

This Tale

IS INSCRIBED BY

THE AUTHOR

A PRELIMINARY WORD

The writer of this Tale ventures, in his own person, to address a very few words, chiefly of explanation, to his readers. A leading situation in this 'Story of Bartram-Haugh' is repeated, with a slight variation, from a short magazine tale of some fifteen pages written by him, and published long ago in a periodical under the title of 'A Passage in the Secret History of an Irish Countess,' and afterwards, still anonymously, in a small volume under an altered title. It is very unlikely that any of his readers should have encountered, and still more so that they should remember, this trifle. The bare possibility, however, he has ventured to anticipate by this brief explanation, lest he should be charged with plagiarism—always a disrespect to a reader.

May he be permitted a few words also of remonstrance against the promiscuous application of the term 'sensation' to that large school of fiction which transgresses no one of those canons of construction and morality which, in producing the unapproachable 'Waverley Novels,' their great author imposed upon himself? No one, it is assumed, would describe Sir Walter Scott's romances as 'sensation novels;' yet in that marvellous series there is not a single tale in which death, crime, and, in some form, mystery, have not a place.

Passing by those grand romances of 'Ivanhoe,' 'Old Mortality,' and 'Kenilworth,' with their terrible intricacies of crime and bloodshed, constructed with so fine a mastery of the art of exciting suspense and horror, let the reader pick out those two exceptional novels in the series which profess to paint contemporary manners and the scenes of common life; and remembering in the 'Antiquary' the vision in the tapestried chamber, the duel, the horrible secret, and the death of old Elspeth, the drowned fisherman, and above all the tremendous situation of the tide-bound party under the cliffs; and in 'St. Ronan's Well,' the long-drawn mystery, the suspicion of insanity, and the catastrophe of suicide;—determine whether an epithet which it would be a profanation to apply to the structure of any, even the most exciting of Sir Walter Scott's stories, is

fairly applicable to tales which, though illimitably inferior in execution, yet observe the same limitations of incident, and the same moral aims.

The author trusts that the Press, to whose masterly criticism and generous encouragement he and other humble labourers in the art owe so much, will insist upon the limitation of that degrading term to the peculiar type of fiction which it was originally intended to indicate, and prevent, as they may, its being made to include the legitimate school of tragic English romance, which has been ennobled, and in great measure founded, by the genius of Sir Walter Scott.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER

1. AUSTIN RUTHYN, OF KNOWL, AND HIS DAUGHTER
2. UNCLE SILAS
3. A NEW FACE
4. MADAME DE LA ROUGIERRE
5. SIGHTS AND NOISES
6. A WALK IN THE WOOD
7. CHURCH SCARSDALE
8. THE SMOKER
9. MONICA KNOLLYS
10. LADY KNOLLYS REMOVES A COVERLET
11. LADY KNOLLYS SEES THE FEATURES
12. A CURIOUS CONVERSATION
13. BEFORE AND AFTER BREAKFAST
14. ANGRY WORDS
15. A WARNING
16. DOCTOR BRYERLY LOOKS IN
17. AN ADVENTURE
18. A MIDNIGHT VISITOR
19. AU REVOIR
20. AUSTIN RUTHYN SETS OUT ON HIS JOURNEY
21. ARRIVALS
22. SOMEBODY IN THE ROOM WITH THE COFFIN
23. I TALK WITH DOCTOR BRYERLY
24. THE OPENING OF THE WILL
25. I HEAR FROM UNCLE SILAS
26. THE STORY OF UNCLE SILAS
27. MORE ABOUT TOM CHARKE'S SUICIDE
28. I AM PERSUADED
29. HOW THE AMBASSADOR FARED
30. ON THE ROAD

31. BARTRAM-HAUGH
32. UNCLE SILAS
33. THE WINDMILL WOOD
34. ZAMIEL
35. WE VISIT A ROOM IN THE SECOND STOREY
36. AN ARRIVAL AT DEAD OF NIGHT
37. DOCTOR BRYERLY EMERGES
38. A MIDNIGHT DEPARTURE
39. COUSIN MONICA AND UNCLE SILAS MEET
40. IN WHICH I MAKE ANOTHER COUSIN'S ACQUAINTANCE
41. MY COUSIN DUDLEY
42. ELVERSTON AND ITS PEOPLE
43. NEWS AT BARTRAM GATE
44. A FRIEND ARISES
45. A CHAPTER-FULL OF LOVERS
46. THE RIVALS
47. DOCTOR BRYERLY REAPPEARS
48. QUESTION AND ANSWER
49. AN APPARITION
50. MILLY'S FAREWELL
51. SARAH MATILDA COMES TO LIGHT
52. THE PICTURE OF A WOLF
53. AN ODD PROPOSAL
54. IN SEARCH OF MR. CHARKE'S SKELETON
55. THE FOOT OF HERCULES
56. I CONSPIRE
57. THE LETTER
58. LADY KNOLLYS' CARRIAGE
59. A SUDDEN DEPARTURE
60. THE JOURNEY
61. OUR BED-CHAMBER
62. A WELL-KNOWN FACE LOOKS IN
63. SPICED CLARET
64. THE HOUR OF DEATH
65. IN THE OAK PARLOUR
66. CONCLUSION