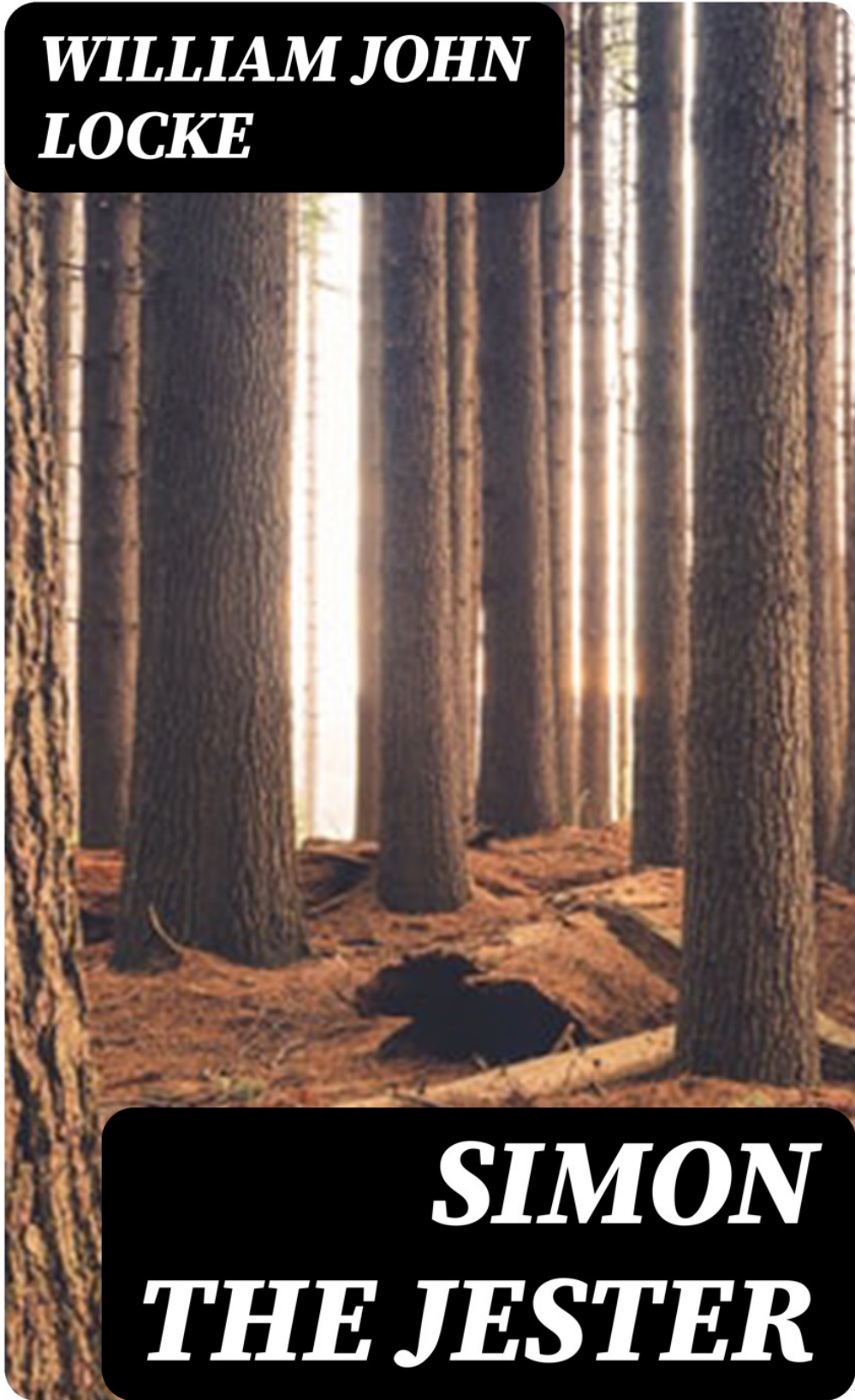


A photograph of a forest with tall, straight tree trunks and sunlight filtering through the canopy. The trees are dark brown with rough bark, and the ground is covered in brown pine needles and fallen branches. The lighting is warm and golden, suggesting late afternoon or early morning.

***WILLIAM JOHN  
LOCKE***

***SIMON  
THE JESTER***

***WILLIAM JOHN  
LOCKE***



***SIMON  
THE JESTER***

**William John Locke**

# **Simon the Jester**

EAN 8596547130819

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: [DigiCat@okpublishing.info](mailto:DigiCat@okpublishing.info)



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

[CHAPTER I](#)

[CHAPTER II](#)

[CHAPTER III](#)

[CHAPTER IV](#)

[CHAPTER V](#)

[CHAPTER VI](#)

[CHAPTER VII](#)

[CHAPTER VIII](#)

[CHAPTER IX](#)

[CHAPTER X](#)

[CHAPTER XI](#)

[CHAPTER XII](#)

[CHAPTER XIII](#)

[CHAPTER XIV](#)

[CHAPTER XV](#)

[CHAPTER XVI](#)

[CHAPTER XVII](#)

[CHAPTER XVIII](#)

[CHAPTER XIX](#)

[Agatha proved herself the good soul I had represented her to be.](#)

[CHAPTER XX](#)

[CHAPTER XXI](#)

[CHAPTER XXII](#)

[CHAPTER XXIII](#)

[CHAPTER XXIV](#)

# CHAPTER I

## Table of Contents

I met Renniker the other day at the club. He is a man who knows everything—from the method of trimming a puppy's tail for a dog-show, without being disqualified, to the innermost workings of the mind of every European potentate. If I want information on any subject under heaven I ask Renniker.

“Can you tell me,” said I, “the most God-forsaken spot in England?”

Renniker, being in a flippant mood, mentioned a fashionable watering-place on the South Coast. I pleaded the seriousness of my question.

“What I want,” said I, “is a place compared to which Golgotha, Aceldama, the Dead Sea, the Valley of Jehoshaphat, and the Bowery would be leafy bowers of uninterrupted delight.”

“Then Murglebed-on-Sea is what you're looking for,” said Renniker. “Are you going there at once?”

“At once,” said I.

“It's November,” said he, “and a villainous November at that; so you'll see Murglebed-on-Sea in the fine flower of its desolation.”

I thanked him, went home, and summoned my excellent man Rogers.

“Rogers,” said I, “I am going to the seaside. I heard that Murglebed is a nice quiet little spot. You will go down and inspect it for me and bring back a report.”



He went blithe and light-hearted, though he thought me insane; he returned with the air of a serving-man who, expecting to find a well-equipped pantry, had wandered into a charnel house.

“It's an awful place, sir. It's sixteen miles from a railway station. The shore is a mud flat. There's no hotel, and the inhabitants are like cannibals.”

“I start for Murglebed-on-Sea to-morrow,” said I.

Rogers started at me. His loose mouth quivered like that of a child preparing to cry.

“We can't possibly stay there, sir,” he remonstrated.

“We are not going to try,” I retorted. “I'm going by myself.”

His face brightened. Almost cheerfully he assured me that I should find nothing to eat in Murglebed.

“You can amuse yourself,” said I, “by sending me down a daily hamper of provisions.”

“There isn't even a church,” he continued.

“Then you can send me down a tin one from Humphreys'. I believe they can supply one with everything from a tin rabbit-hutch to a town hall.”

He sighed and departed, and the next day I found myself here, in Murglebed-on-Sea.

On a murky, sullen November day Murglebed exhibits unimagined horrors of scenic depravity. It snarls at you malignantly. It is like a bit of waste land in Gehenna. There is a lowering, soap-suddy thing a mile away from the more or less dry land which local ignorance and superstition call the sea. The interim is mud—oozy, brown, malevolent mud. Sometimes it seems to heave as if with the myriad bodies of

slimy crawling eels and worms and snakes. A few foul boats lie buried in it.

Here and there, on land, a surly inhabitant spits into it. If you address him he snorts at you unintelligibly. If you turn your back to the sea you are met by a prospect of unimagined despair. There are no trees. The country is flat and barren. A dismal creek runs miles inland—an estuary fed by the River Murgle. A few battered cottages, a general shop, a couple of low public-houses, and three perky red-brick villas all in a row form the city, or town, or village, or what you will, of Murglebed-on-Sea. Renniker is a wonderful man.

I have rented a couple of furnished rooms in one of the villas. It has a decayed bit of front garden in which a gnarled, stunted stick is planted, and it is called The Laburnums. My landlord, the owner of the villas, is a builder. What profits he can get from building in Murglebed, Heaven alone knows; but, as he mounts a bicycle in the morning and disappears for the rest of the day, I presume he careers over the waste, building as he goes. In the evenings he gets drunk at the Red Cow; so I know little of him, save that he is a red-faced man, with a Moustache like a tooth-brush and two great hands like hams.

His wife is taciturn almost to dumbness. She is a thick-set, black-haired woman, and looks at me disapprovingly out of the corner of her eye as if I were a blackbeetle which she would like to squash under foot. She tolerates me, however, on account of the tongues and other sustenance sent by Rogers from Benoist, of which she consumes prodigious quantities. She wonders, as far as the power of

wonder is given to her dull brain, what on earth I am doing here. I see her whispering to her friends as I enter the house, and I know they are wondering what I am doing here. The whole village regards me as a humorous zoological freak, and wonders what I am doing here among normal human beings.

And what am I doing here—I, Simon de Gex, M.P., the spoilt darling of fortune, as my opponent in the Labour interest called me during the last electoral campaign? My disciple and secretary, young Dale Kynnersley, the only mortal besides Rogers who knows my whereabouts, trembles for my reason. In the eyes of the excellent Rogers I am horn-mad. What my constituents would think did they see me taking the muddy air on a soggy afternoon, I have no conception. Dale keeps them at bay. He also baffles the curiosity of my sisters, and by his diplomacy has sent Eleanor Faversham on a huffy trip to Sicily. She cannot understand why I bury myself in bleak solitude, instead of making cheerful holiday among the oranges and lemons of the South.

Eleanor is a girl with a thousand virtues, each of which she expects to find in counterpart in the man to whom she is affianced. Until a week or two ago I actually thought myself in love with Eleanor. There seemed a whimsical attraction in the idea of marrying a girl with a thousand virtues. Before me lay the pleasant prospect of reducing them—say, ten at a time—until I reached the limit at which life was possible, and then one by one until life became entertaining. I admired her exceedingly—a strapping,



healthy English girl who looked you straight in the eyes and gripped you fearlessly by the hand.

My friends "lucky-dog'd" me until I began to smirk to myself at my own good fortune. She visited the constituency and comported herself as if she had been a Member's wife since infancy, thereby causing my heart to swell with noble pride. This unparalleled young person compelled me to take my engagement almost seriously. If I shot forth a jest, it struck against a virtue and fell blunted to the earth. Indeed, even now I am sorry I can't marry Eleanor. But marriage is out of the question.

I have been told by the highest medical authorities that I may manage to wander in the flesh about this planet for another six months. After that I shall have to do what wandering I yearn for through the medium of my ghost. There is a certain humourousness in the prospect. Save for an occasional pain somewhere inside me, I am in the most robust health.

But this same little pain has been diagnosed by the Faculty as the symptom of an obscure disease. An operation, they tell me, would kill me on the spot. What it is called I cannot for the life of me remember. They gave it a kind of lingering name, which I wrote down on my shirt-cuff.

The name or characteristics of the thing, however, do not matter a fig. I have always hated people who talked about their insides, and I am not going to talk about mine, even to myself. Clearly, if it is only going to last me six months, it is not worth talking about. But the quaint fact of its brief duration is worth the attention of a contemplative mind.

It is in order perfectly to focus this attention that I have come to Murglebed-on-Sea. Here I am alone with the murk and the mud and my own indrawn breath of life. There are no flowers, blue sky, smiling eyes, and dainty faces—none of the adventitious distractions of the earth. There are no Blue-books. Before the Faculty made their jocular pronouncement I had been filling my head with statistics on pauper lunacy so as to please my constituency, in which the rate has increased alarmingly of late years. Perhaps that is why I found myself their representative in Parliament. I was to father a Bill on the subject next session. Now the labour will fall on other shoulders. I interest myself in pauper lunacy no more. A man requires less flippant occupation for the premature sunset of his days. Well, in Murglebed I can think, I can weigh the *pros* and *cons* of existence with an even mind, I can accustom myself to the concept of a Great Britain without Simon de Gex. M.P.

Of course, when I go I shall “cast one longing, lingering look behind.” I don't particularly want to die. In fact, having otherwise the prospect of an entertaining life, I regard my impending dissolution in the light of a grievance. But I am not afraid. I shall go through the dismal formality with a graceful air and as much of a smile on my face as the pain in my inside will physically permit.

My dear but somewhat sober-sided friend Marcus Aurelius says: “Let death surprise me when it will, and where it will, I may be *eumoiros*, or a happy man, nevertheless. For he is a happy man who in his lifetime dealeth unto himself a happy lot and portion. A happy lot

and portion in good inclinations of the soul, good desires, good actions.”

The word *eumoiros* according to the above definition, tickles my fancy. I would give a great deal to be eumoirous. What a thing to say: “I have achieved eumoiriety,”—namely the quintessence of happy-fatedness dealt unto oneself by a perfect altruism!

I don't think that hitherto my soul has been very evilly inclined, my desires base, or my actions those of a scoundrel. Still, the negatives do not qualify one for eumoiriety. One wants something positive. I have an idea, therefore, of actively dealing unto myself a happy lot or portion according to the Marcian definition during the rest of the time I am allowed to breathe the upper air. And this will be fairly easy; for no matter how excellently a man's soul may be inclined to the performance of a good action, in ninety cases out of a hundred he is driven away from it by dread of the consequences. Your moral teachers seldom think of this—that the consequences of a good action are often more disastrous than those of an evil one. But if a man is going to die, he can do good with impunity. He can simply wallow in practical virtue. When the boomerang of his beneficence comes back to hit him on the head—*he won't be there to feel it*. He can thus hoist Destiny with its own petard, and, besides, being eumoirous, can spend a month or two in a peculiarly diverting manner. The more I think of the idea the more am I in love with it. I am going to have a seraph of a time. I am going to play the archangel.

I shall always have pleasant memories of Murglebed. Such an idea could not have germinated in any other

atmosphere. In the scented groves of sunny lands there would have been sown Seeds of Regret, which would have blossomed eventually into Flowers of Despair. I should have gone about the world, a modern Admetus, snivelling at my accursed luck, without even the chance of persuading a soft-hearted Alcestis to die for me. I should have been a dismal nuisance to society.

“Bless you,” I cried this afternoon, waving, as I leaned against a post, my hand to the ambient mud, “Renniker was wrong! You are not a God-forsaken place. You are impregnated with divine inspiration.”

A muddy man in a blue jersey and filthy beard who occupied the next post looked at me and spat contemptuously. I laughed.

“If you were Marcus Aurelius,” said I, “I would make a joke—a short life and an eumoiry one—and he would have looked as pained as you.”

“What?” he bawled. He was to windward of me.

I knew that if I repeated my observation he would offer to fight me. I approached him suavely.

“I was wondering,” I said, “as it's impossible to strike a match in this wind, whether you would let me light my pipe from yours.”

“It's empty,” he growled.

“Take a fill from my pouch,” said I.

The mud-turtle loaded his pipe, handed me my pouch without acknowledgment, stuck his pipe in his breeches pocket, spat again, and, deliberately turning his back, on me, lounged off to another post on a remoter and less lunatic-ridden portion of the shore. Again I laughed, feeling,

as the poet did with the daffodils, that one could not but be gay in such a jocund company.

There are no amenities or urbanities of life in Murglebed to choke the growth of the Idea. This evening it flourishes so exceedingly that I think it safe to transplant it in the alien soil of Q 3, The Albany, where the good Rogers must be leading an idle existence peculiarly deleterious to his morals.

This gives one furiously to think. One of the responsibilities of eumoiriety must be the encouragement and development of virtue in my manservant.

Also in my young friend and secretary, Dale Kynnersley. He is more to me than Rogers. I may confess that, so long as Rogers is a sober, honest, me-fearing valet, in my heart of hearts I don't care a hang about Rogers's morals. But about those of Dale Kynnersley I do. I care a great deal for his career and happiness. I have a notion that he is erring after strange goddesses and neglecting the little girl who is in love with him. He must be delivered. He must marry Maisie Ellerton, and the two of them must bring lots of capable, clear-eyed Kynnersleys into the world. I long to be their ghostly godfather.

Then there's Eleanor Faversham—but if I begin to draw up a programme I shall lose that spontaneity of effort which, I take it, is one of the chief charms of dealing unto oneself a happy lot and portion. No; my soul abhors tabulation. It would make even six months' life as jocular as Bradshaw's Railway Guide or the dietary of a prison. I prefer to look on what is before me as a high adventure, and with that prospect in view I propose to jot down my experiences from

time to time, so that when I am wandering, a pale shade by Acheron, young Dale Kynnersley may have not only documentary evidence wherewith to convince my friends and relations that my latter actions were not those of a lunatic, but also, at the same time, an up-to-date version of Jeremy Taylor's edifying though humour-lacking treatise on the act of dying, which I am sorely tempted to label "The Rule and Example of Eumoiriety." I shall resist the temptation, however. Dale Kynnersley—such is the ignorance of the new generation—would have no sense of the allusion. He would shake his head and say, "Dotty, poor old chap, dotty!" I can hear him. And if, in order to prepare him, I gave him a copy of the "Meditations," he would fling the book across the room and qualify Marcus Aurelius as a "rotter."

Dale is a very shrewd fellow, and will make an admirable legislator when his time comes. Although his highest intellectual recreation is reiterated attendance at the musical comedy that has caught his fancy for the moment and his favourite literature the sporting pages of the daily papers, he has a curious feline pounce on the salient facts of a political situation, and can thread the mazes of statistics with the certainty of a Hampton Court guide. His enthusiastic researches (on my behalf) into pauper lunacy are remarkable in one so young. I foresee him an invaluable chairman of committee. But he will never become a statesman. He has too passionate a faith in facts and figures, and has not cultivated a sense of humour at the expense of the philosophers. Young men who do not read them lose a great deal of fun.

Well, to-morrow I leave Murglebed for ever; it has my benison. Democritus returns to London.



# CHAPTER II

## Table of Contents

I was at breakfast on the morning after my arrival in London, when Dale Kynnersley rushed in and seized me violently by the hand.

“By Jove, here you are at last!”

I smoothed my crushed fingers. “You have such a vehement manner of proclaiming the obvious, my dear Dale.”

“Oh, rot!” he said. “Here, Rogers, give me some tea—and I think I'll have some toast and marmalade.”

“Haven't you breakfasted?”

A cloud overspread his ingenuous countenance.

“I came down late, and everything was cold and mother was on edge. The girls are always doing the wrong things and I never do the right ones—you know the mater—so I swallowed a tepid kidney and rushed off.”

“Save for her worries over you urchins,” said I, “I hope Lady Kynnersley is well?”

He filled his mouth with toast and marmalade, and nodded. He is a good-looking boy, four-and-twenty—idyllic age! He has sleek black hair brushed back from his forehead over his head, an olive complexion, and a keen, open, clean-shaven face. He wore a dark-brown lounge suit and a wine-coloured tie, and looked immaculate. I remember him as the grubbiest little wretch that ever disgraced Harrow.

He swallowed his mouthful and drank some tea.

“Recovered your sanity?” he asked.

“The dangerous symptoms have passed over,” I replied. “I undertake not to bite.”

He regarded me as though he were not quite certain, and asked in his pronounless way whether I was glad to be back in London.

“Yes,” said I. “Rogers is the only human creature who can properly wax the ends of my moustache. It got horribly limp in the air of Murglebed. That is the one and only disadvantage of the place.”

“Doesn't seem to have done you much good,” he remarked, scanning me critically. “You are as white as you were before you went away. Why the blazes you didn't go to Madeira, or the South of France, or South Africa I can't imagine.”

“I don't suppose you can,” said I. “Any news?”

“I should think I have! But first let me go through the appointments.”

He consulted a pocket-book. On December 2nd I was to dine with Tanners' Company and reply to the toast of “The House of Commons.” On the 4th my constituency claimed me for the opening of a bazaar at Wymington. A little later I was to speak somewhere in the North of England at a by-election in support of the party candidate.

“It will be fought on Tariff Reform, about which I know nothing,” I objected.

“I know everything,” he declared. “I'll see you through. You must buck up a bit, Simon, and get your name better known about the country. And this brings me to my news. I was talking to Raggles the other day—he dropped a hint, and Raggles's hints are jolly well worth while picking up. Just

come to the front and show yourself, and there's a place in the Ministry."

"Ministry?"

"Sanderson's going."

"Sanderson?" I queried, interested, in spite of myself, at these puerilities. "What's the matter with him?"

"Swelled head. There have been awful rows—this is confidential—and he's got the hump. Thinks he ought to be the Chancellor of the Exchequer, or at least First Lord, instead of an Under Secretary. So he's going to chuck it, before he gets the chuck himself—see?"

"I perceive," said I, "that your conversational English style is abominable."

He lit a cigarette and continued, loftily taking no notice of my rebuke.

"There's bound to be a vacancy. Why shouldn't you fill it? They seem to want you. You're miles away over the heads of the average solemn duffers who get office."

I bowed acknowledgment of his tribute.

"Well, you will buck up and try for it, won't you? I'm awfully proud of you already, but I should go off my head with joy if you were in the Ministry."

I met his honest young eyes as well as I could. How was I going to convey to his candid intelligence the fact of my speedy withdrawal from political life without shattering his illusions? Besides, his devotion touched me, and his generous aspirations were so futile. Office! It was in my grasp. Raggles, with his finger always on the pulse of the party machine, was the last man in the world to talk nonsense. I only had to "buck up." Yet by the time

Sanderson sends in his resignation to the King of England, I shall have sent in mine to the King of Hosts. I moved slightly in my chair, and a twinge of the little pain inside brought a gasp to my throat. But I felt grateful to it. It was saving me from an unconscionable deal of worry. Fancy going to a confounded office every morning like a clerk in the City! I was happier at peace. I rose and warmed myself by the fire. Dale regarded me uncomprehendingly.

“You look as if the prospect bored you to tears. I thought you would be delighted.”

“*Vanitas vanitatum,*” said I. “*Omnia vanitas.*”

“Rot!” said Dale.

“It's true.”

“I must fetch Eleanor Faversham back from Sicily,” said Dale.

“Don't,” said I.

“Well, I give you up,” he declared, pushing his chair from the table and swinging one leg across the other. I leaned forward and scrutinised his ankles.

“What are you looking at?”

“There must be something radically wrong with you, Dale,” I murmured sympathetically. “It is part of the religion of your generation to wear socks to match your tie. To-day your tie is wine-coloured and your socks are green——”

“Good Lord,” he cried, “so they are! I dressed myself anyhow this morning.”

“What's wrong with you?”

He threw his cigarette impatiently into the fire.

“Every infernal thing that can possibly be. Everything's rotten—but I've not come here to talk about myself.”

“Why not?”

“It isn't the game. I'm here on your business, which is ever so much more important than mine. Where are this morning's letters?”

I pointed to an unopened heap on a writing-table at the end of the room. He crossed and sat down before them. Presently he turned sharply.

“You haven't looked through the envelopes. Here is one from Sicily.”

I took the letter from him, and sighed to myself as I read it. Eleanor was miserable. The Sicilians were dirty. The Duomo of Palermo did not come up to her expectations. The Mobray-Robertsons, with whom she travelled, quarrelled with their food. They had never even heard of Theocritus. She had a cold in her head, and was utterly at a loss to explain my attitude. Therefore she was coming back to London.

I wish I could find her a nice tame husband who had heard of Theocritus. It would be such a good thing for everybody, husband included. For, I repeat, Eleanor is a young woman of fine character, and the man to whom she gives her heart will be a fortunate fellow.

While I was reading the letter and meditating on it, with my back to the fire, Dale plunged into the morning's correspondence with an air of enjoyment. That is the astonishing thing about him. He loves work. The more I give him to do the better he likes it. His cronies, who in raiment, manners, and tastes differ from him no more than a row of pins differs from a stray brother, regard a writing-chair as a mediaeval instrument of torture, and faint at the sight of

ink. They will put themselves to all kinds of physical and pecuniary inconvenience in order to avoid regular employment. They are the tramps of the fashionable world. But in vain do they sing to Dale of the joys of silk-hatted and patent-leather-booted vagabondage and deride his habits of industry; Dale turns a deaf ear to them and urges on his strenuous career. Rogers, coming in to clear away the breakfast things, was despatched by my young friend to fetch a portfolio from the hall. It contained, he informed me, the unanswered letters of the past fortnight with which he had found himself unqualified to deal. He grasped the whole bundle of correspondence, and invited me to follow him to the library and start on a solid morning's work. I obeyed meekly. He sat down at the big table, arranged the pile in front of him, took a pencil from the tray, and began:

“This is from Finch, of the *Universal Review*.”

I put my hand on his shoulder.

“Tell him, my boy, that it's against my custom to breakfast at afternoon tea, and that I hope his wife is well.”

At his look of bewilderment I broke into a laugh.

“He wants me to write a dull article for his stupid paper, doesn't he?”

“Yes, on Poor Law Administration.”

“I'm not going to do it. I'm not going to do anything these people ask me. Say 'No, no, no, no,' to everybody.”

“In Heaven's name, Simon,” he cried, laying down his pencil, “what has come over you?”

“Old age,” said I.

He uttered his usual interjection, and added that I was only thirty-seven.

“Age is a relative thing,” I remarked. “Babes of five have been known to die of senile decay, and I have seen irresponsible striplings of seventy.”

“I really think Eleanor Faversham had better come back from Sicily.”

I tapped the letter still in my hand. “She's coming.”

“I'm jolly glad to hear it. It's all my silly fault that she went away. I thought she was getting on your nerves. But you want pulling together. That confounded place you've been to has utterly upset you.”

“On the contrary,” said I, “it has steadied and amplified my conception of sublunary affairs. It has shown me that motley is much more profitable wear than the edged toga of the senator—”

“Oh, for God's sake, dry up,” cried young England, “and tell me what answers I'm to give these people!”

He seemed so earnest about it that I humoured him; and my correspondents seemed so earnest that I humoured them. But it was a grim jest. Most of the matters with which I had to deal appeared so trivial. Only here and there did I find a chance for eumoiriety. The Wymington Hospital applied for their annual donation.

“You generally give a tenner,” said Dale.

“This time I'll give them a couple of hundred,” said I.

Dale earmarked the amount wonderingly; but when I ordered him to send five pounds apiece to the authors of various begging letters he argued vehemently and quoted the Charity Organisation Society.

“They're frauds, all of them,” he maintained.



“They're poor necessitous devils, at any rate,” said I, “and they want the money more than I do.”

This was a truth whose significance Dale was far from realising. Of what value, indeed, is money to me? There is none to whom I can usefully bequeath my little fortune, my sisters having each married rich men. I shall not need even Charon's obolus when I am dead, for we have ceased to believe in him—which is a pity, as the trip across the Styx must have been picturesque. Why, then, should I not deal myself a happy lot and portion by squandering my money benevolently during my lifetime?

It behoves me, however, to walk warily in this as in other matters, for if my actions too closely resemble those of a lunatic at large, trustees may be appointed to administer my affairs, which would frustrate my plans entirely.

When my part in the morning's work was over, I informed my secretary that I would go out and take the air till lunch-time.

“If you've nothing better to do,” said he, “you might run round to Eccleston Square and see my mother.”

“For any particular reason?”

“She wants to see you. Home for inebriate parrots or something. Gave me a message for you this morning.”

“I'll wait,” said I, “on Lady Kynnersley with pleasure.”

I went out and walked down the restful covered way of the Albany to the Piccadilly entrance, and began my taking of the air. It was a soft November day, full of blue mist, and invested with a dying grace by a pale sunshine struggling through thin, grey rain-cloud. It was a faded lady of a day—a

lady of waxen cheeks, attired in pearl-grey and old lace, her dim eyes illumined by a last smile. It gave an air of unreality to the perspective of tall buildings, and treated with indulgent irony the passing show of humans—on foot, on omnibuses, in cabs and motors—turning them into shadow shapes tending no whither. I laughed to myself. They all fancied themselves so real. They all had schemes in their heads, as if they were going to live a thousand years. I walked westwards past the great clubs, moralising as I went, and feeling the reaction from the excitement of Murglebed-on-Sea. I looked up at one of my own clubs, a comfortable resting-place, and it struck me as possessing more attractions than the family vault in Highgate Cemetery. An acquaintance at the window waved his hand at me. I thought him a lucky beggar to have that window to stand by when the street will be flooded with summer sunshine and the trees in the green Park opposite wave in their verdant bravery. A little further a radiant being, all chiffons and millinery, on her way to Bond Street for more millinery and chiffons, smiled at me and put forth a delicately-gloved hand.

“Oh, Mr. de Gex, you're the very man I was longing to see!”

“How simply are some human aspirations satisfied!” said I.

“Farfax”—that's her husband, Farfax Glenn, a Member on my side of the House—“Farfax and I are making plans already for the Easter recess. We are going to motor to Athens, and you must come with us. You can tell us all about everything as we pass by.”

I looked grave. "Easter is late next year."

"What does that matter? Say you'll come."

"Alas! my dear Mrs. Glenn," I said, with a smile, "I have an engagement at Easter—a very important one."

"I thought the wedding was not to take place till June."

"It isn't the wedding," said I.

"Then break the engagement."

"It's beyond human power," said I.

She held up her bracelet, from which dangled some charms.

"I think you're a ——" And she pointed to a little golden pig.

"I'm not," I retorted.

"What are you, then?"

"I'm a gentleman in a Greek tragedy."

We laughed and parted, and I went on my way cheered by the encounter. I had spoken the exact truth, and found amusement in doing so. One has often extracted humour from the contemplation of the dissolution of others—that of the giant in "Jack the Giant-killer" for instance, and the demise of the little boy with the pair of skates in the poem. Why not extract it from the contemplation of one's own?

The only disadvantage of my position is that it give me, in spite of myself, an odd sense of isolation from my kind. They are looking forward to Easters and Junes and summers, and I am not. I also have a fatuous feeling of superiority in being in closer touch than they with eternal verities. I must take care that I do not play too much to the gallery, that I do not grow too conceited over the singularity of my situation, and arrive at the mental attitude of the criminal whose

dominant solicitude in connection with his execution was that he should be hanged in his dress clothes. These reflections brought me to Eccleston Square.

Lady Kynnersley is that type of British matron who has children in fits of absent-mindedness, and to whom their existence is a perpetual shock. Her main idea in marrying the late Sir Thomas Kynnersley was to associate herself with his political and philanthropic schemes. She is the born committee woman, to whom a home represents a place where one sleeps and eats in order to maintain the strength required for the performance of committee duties. Her children have always been outside the sphere of her real interests, but, afflicted, as such women are, with chronic inflammation of the conscience, she had devoted the most scrupulous care to their upbringing. She formed herself into a society for the protection of her own children, and managed them by means of a committee, which consisted of herself, and of which she was the honorary secretary. She drew up articles of association and regulations. If Dale contracted measles, she applied by-law 17. If Janet slapped Dorothy, by-law 32 was brought into play. When Dale clamoured for a rocking-horse, she found that the articles of association did not provide for imaginative equitation. As the children grew up, the committee had from time to time to revise the articles and submit them to the general body for approval. There were many meetings before the new sections relating to a University career for the boy and the coming out for the girls were satisfactorily drafted. Once given the effect of law, however, there was no appeal against these provisions. Both committee and general body

were powerless. Dale certainly owed his methodical habits to his mechanical training, but whence he derived and how he maintained his exuberance and spontaneity has often puzzled me. He himself accounts for it on the score of heredity, in that an ancestress of his married a highwayman who was hanged at Tyburn under William and Mary.

In person Lady Kynnersley is lean and blanched and grey-haired. She wears gold spectacles, which stand out oddly against the thin whiteness of her face; she is still a handsome, distinguished woman, who can have, when she chooses, a most gracious manner. As I, worldling and jester though I am, for some mysterious reason have found favour in the lady's eyes, she manifests this graciousness whenever we foregather. Ergo, I like Lady Kynnersley, and would put myself to much inconvenience in order to do her a service.

She kept me waiting in the drawing-room but a minute before she made her appearance, grasped my hand, proclaimed my goodness in responding so soon to her call, bade me sit down on the sofa by her side, inquired after my health, and, the gods of politeness being propitiated, plunged at once into the midst of matters.

Dale was going downhill headlong to Gadarene catastrophe. He had no eyes or ears or thoughts for any one in the world but for a certain Lola Brandt, a brazen creature from a circus, the shape of whose limbs was the common knowledge of mankind from Dublin to Yokohama, and whose path by sea and land, from Yokohama to Dublin, was strewn with the bodies of her victims. With this man-eating tigress, declared Lady Kynnersley, was Dale infatuated. He scorched

himself morning, noon, and night in her devastating presence. Had cut himself adrift from home, from society. Had left trailing about on his study table a jeweller's bill for a diamond bracelet. Was committing follies that made my brain reel to hear. Had threatened, if worried much longer, to marry the Scarlet One incontinently. Heaven knew, cried Lady Kynnersley, how many husbands she had already—scattered along the track between Dublin and Yokohama. There was no doubt about it. Dale was hurtling down to everlasting bonfire. She looked to me to hold out the restraining hand.

“You have already spoken to Dale on the subject?” I asked, mindful of the inharmonious socks and tie.

“I can talk to him of nothing else,” said Lady Kynnersley desperately.

“That's a pity,” said I. “You should talk to him of Heaven, or pigs, or Babylonian cuneiform—anything but Lola Brandt. You ought to go to work on a different system.”

“But I haven't a system at all,” cried the poor lady. “How was I to foresee that my only son was going to fall in love with a circus rider? These are contingencies in life for which one, with all the thought in the world, can make no provision. I had arranged, as you know, that he should marry Maisie Ellerton, as charming a girl as ever there was. Isn't she? And an independent fortune besides.”

“A rosebud wrapped in a gold leaf,” I murmured.

“Now he's breaking the child's heart——”

“There was never any engagement between them, I am sure of that,” I remarked.

“There wasn't. But I gave her to understand it was a settled affair—merely a question of Dale speaking. And, instead of speaking, he will have nothing to do with her, and spends all his time—and, I suppose, though I don't like to refer to it, all his money—in the society of this unmentionable woman.”

“Is she really so—so red as she is painted?” I asked.

“She isn't painted at all. That's where her artful and deceitful devilry comes in——”

“I suppose Dale,” said I, “declares her to be an angel of light and purity?”

“An angel on horseback! Whoever heard of such a thing?”

“It's the name of a rather fiery savoury,” said I.

“In a circus!” she continued.

“Well,” said I, “the ring of a circus is not essentially one of the circles in Dante's Inferno.”

“Of course, my dear Simon,” she said, with some impatience, “if you defend him——”

I hastened to interrupt her. “I don't. I think he is an egregious young idiot; but before taking action it's well to get a clear idea of the facts. By the way, how do you know she's not painted?”

“I've seen her—seen her with my own eyes in Dale's company—at the Savoy. He's there supping with her every night. General Lamont told me. I wouldn't believe it—Dale flaunting about in public with her. The General offered to take me there after the inaugural meeting of the International Aid Society at Grosvenor House. I went, and saw them together. I shall never forget the look in the boy's



eyes till my dying day. She has got him body and soul. One reads of such things in the poets, one sees it in pictures; but I've never come across it in real life—never, never. It's dreadful, horrible, revolting. To think that a son of mine, brought up from babyhood to calculate all his actions with mathematical precision, should be guilty of this profligacy! It's driving me mad, Simon; it really is. I don't know what to do. I've come to the end of my resources. It's your turn now. The boy worships you.”

A wild appeal burned in her eyes and was refracted oddly through her near-sighted spectacles. I had never seen her betray emotion before during all the years of our friendship. The look and the tone of her voice moved me. I expressed my sympathy and my readiness to do anything in my power to snatch the infatuated boy from the claw and fang of the syren and hale him to the forgiving feet of Maisie Ellerton. Indeed, such a chivalrous adventure had vaguely passed through my mind during my exalted mood at Murglebed-on-Sea. But then I knew little beyond the fact that Dale was fluttering round an undesirable candle. Till now I had no idea of the extent to which his wings were singed.

“Hasn't Dale spoken to you about this creature?” his mother asked.

“Young men of good taste keep these things from their elders, my dear Lady Kynnersley,” said I.

“But you knew of it?”

“In a dim sort of way.”

“Oh, Simon—”

“The baby boys of Dale's set regard taking out the chorus to supper as a solemn religious rite. They wouldn't think