

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 stared 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