

DISJECTA MEMBRA POETAE

the arch into the back shop, the floor of which was raised in a sort of platform. On the platform was a table, and at the table sat the young man compiling the Quarterly Catalogue.

Front shop and back shop reeked with the smells of new mahogany, dust, pillar-stove, gum, hot-pressed paper and Russia leather. He sat in the middle of them, in an atmosphere so thick that it could be seen hanging about him like an aura, luminous in the glare of the electric light. His slender, nervous hands worked rapidly, with a business-like air of dexterity and dispatch. But every now and then he raised his head and stared for quite a long time at the round, white, foolish face of the clock, and whenever he did this his eyes were the eyes of a young man who has no adequate sense of his surroundings.

The remarkable thing about the new shop was that already, like a bar or a restaurant, it drew to it a certain group of young men, punctually, irresistibly. A small group—you could almost count them on the fingers of one hand—they came from Fleet Street, from the Temple, from the Junior Journalists' Club over the way. They were never seen looking in at the windows or hanging about the counter; they were not the least bit of good to the shop, those customers. But they were evidently some good to the young man. Whatever they did or did not do, they always ended by drifting to the platform, to his table. They sat on it in friendly attitudes and talked to him.

He was so glad to be talked to, so frankly, engagingly, beautifully glad, that the pathos of it would have been too poignant, the obligation it almost forced on you too unbearable, but for his power, his monstrous, mysterious, personal glamour.

It lay partly, no doubt, in his appearance; not, no, not at all, in his make-up. He wore, like a thousand city clerks, a high collar, a speckled tie, a straight, dark blue serge suit. But in spite of the stiffness thus imposed on him, he had, unaccountably, the shy, savage beauty of an animal untamed, uncaught. He belonged to the slender, nervous, fair type; but the colour proper to it had been taken out of him by the shop. His head presented the utmost clearness of line compatible with irregularity of outline; and his face (from its heavy square forehead to its light square jaw) was