

THE DIVINE FIRE

—*mind*, if you please—he'd very much rather not. It's only the last week (when the *Saturnalia* were getting better and better) that he graciously permitted his initials to appear. S. K. R.—Savage Keith Rickman."

"Good Lord!" said Rankin; "what must he be like?"

"Ask Jewdwine," said Stables; "he's Jewdwine's man."

"Excuse *me*," said Maddox, "he is *mine*. I say, Jewdwine, what is he like?"

Jewdwine did not respond very eagerly; he wanted to get on with his letter. But the club had another unwritten law as to writing. If a majority of members desired to write, silence was vigorously insisted on. Any number short of a majority wrote as best they could. For this unfortunate scribe there could be no concession; he was in a minority of one.

"If"—said he, "you can imagine the soul of a young Sophocles, battling with that of a—of a junior journalist in the body of a dissipated little Cockney——"

"Can't," said Stables. "Haven't got enough imagination."

"The child of 'Ellas and of Ollywell Street—innocent of—er—the rough breathing," suggested Maddox.

As it was now seven o'clock, and the Junior Journalists were dropping off one by one to the dining-room below, the young men of *The Planet* began to stretch their legs, and raise their voices, and behave like young men who believe their privacy to be inviolable and complete. They soon had the place to themselves, except for one person whose entrance had been covered by the outgoing stream; and he had delicately turned his back on them, and taken a seat in the farthest window, where his unobtrusive presence could be no possible hindrance to conversation.

"I've seen him after supper," said Maddox. He was obliged to speak rather loudly, because of the noise that came up from the overcrowded dining-room.

"Well, then, how did he strike you?"

Maddox's eyes curled with limpid, infantile devilry.

"Well, I daresay he might be a bit of a bounder when he's sober, but he's a perfect little gentleman when he's drunk. Softens him down somehow."