

SIMON THE JESTER

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 were 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."