

DISJECTA MEMBRA POETAE

intimate with the lady to write about her. At any rate with that noble impartiality which distinguishes the utterances of *The Planet*."

"Steady, man. He *never* told ye *that*!" said Mackinnon.

"I didn't say he *told* me, I said he informed me."

"And whar's the differ'nce? I don't see it at all."

"Trepan him, trepan him."

Stables took out his pen-knife and indicated by dumb show a surgical operation on Mackinnon's dome-like head.

"I gathered it," continued Maddox suavely, "from his manner. I culled his young thought like a flower."

"Perhaps," Rankin suggested, "he was afraid of compromising Poppy."

"He might have left that subtle consideration to Pilkington."

"That was it. He scented Dicky's hand in it, and wasn't particularly anxious to oblige him. The point of the joke is that he happens to owe Dicky a great deal more than he can conveniently pay. That'll give you some faint notion of the magnificence of his cheek."

Stables was impressed. He wondered what sort of young man it could be who had the moral courage to oppose Dicky Pilkington at such a moment. He could not have done it himself. Dicky Pilkington was the great and mysterious power at the back of *The Planet*.

"But this isn't the end of it. I told him, for his future guidance and encouragement, that he had mistaken cause and effect—that little variety *artistes*, like other people, are not popular because they are written about, but written about because they are popular—that *The Planet* is the organ of public opinion, not of private opinions; in short, that he wasn't in it, at all. I thought I'd sat on him till he was about flat—and the very next week he comes bounding in with his *Saturnalia*, as he calls them."

"That was your moment. Why didn't you rise up in your majesty and r-r-reject them?"

"Couldn't. They were too damned good." Maddox smiled at the reminiscence. "I wasn't going to let him sign them, but he took the wind out of my sails by stating beforehand that he didn't want to—that if I didn't mind