

One chamber contained a wonderful collection of old actions—real ones, we were told by the guide, philosopher, and friend, who joined us and escorted us over the building—a well-read cicerone was he, one eloquent as the original founder of that family, an old Roman family, as compared with which those who came over with the Conqueror are but as yesterday. In this room three ancient servitors John Doe, Richard Roe and the Casual Ejector clad in the composite suits of bye-gone days acted as janitors or caretakers; these servants, hard-worked for generations, were begrimed with dust and dirt; they were of the earth, earthy; for although neither farmers nor real estate agents, they had, until appointed to their present position, always worked in land. Arranged in cases round the rooms were numerous actions, long since disposed of, settled and embalmed in the booklike flies in amber.

“What be these?” I asked, pointing to a trio, evidently triplets, save in so far as the adjectives old, older, oldest, might distinguish them. “These are writs of aiel, besaiel, and tresaiel,” was the answer, given with an air of surprise at the archæological ignorance of the last decade of the nineteenth century.

“And what were they when they lived and moved and had their being?” I queried, for I knew that writs used to run in days when all the rest of the world only crept.

The answer given was, “When a man’s grandfather died seized of land (and in those old days when a man had a grandfather the grandsire always had land), and a stranger entered and kept out the heir, then a writ of aiel issued forth to put things to rights; when a great-grandfather died and a stranger intermeddled, then besaiel was invoked; and when his great-great-grandfather, then tresaiel came to the rescue.”

I felt inclined to ask what writ would have issued if a stranger had interfered on Adam’s death, but the gravity of my guide made me repress all my feelings of levity. Impressed with the keenness of discrimination possessed by our ancestors, I passed on to another set of three, and was told that they were Formedon in descender, Formedon in remainder, and Formedon in reverter. Formidable affairs, by the Olympians!

“Are these antiques?” I questioned.

“They go back to the time of Westminster the Second, in the days of Edward the First.”

“Were they of value?”

“They were the highest writs that any tenant in tail could have to recover land.”

“Have you a tenant in tail here?”

“Yes, many of them of former generations; but the family still survives and is vigorous, especially among the aristocracy.”

“Are all other tenants descended from these entailed ones, as the Darwinians say, that the man of to-day is from the tail-adorned ape?” I enquired, anxiously.

“No, my friend. It is not a case of evolution, but retrogression. Tenants in tail are younger than tenants in fee; they are the offspring of the venerable statute, *De Donis Conditionalibus*. Tail is akin to tailor; yet though it requires