

CHAPTER V

THE little booksellers of the Strand, in their death struggle against Rickman's, never cursed that house more heartily than did the Junior Journalists, in their friendly, shabby little den, smelling of old leather and tobacco and the town. They complained that it cut off two-thirds of the light from the front windows of the reading-room. Not that any of them were ever known to read in it. They used it chiefly as a place to talk in, for which purpose little illumination was required.

To-night one of the windows in question was occupied by a small group of talkers isolated from the rest. There was Mackinnon, of *The Literary Observer*. There were the three wild young spirits of *The Planet*, Stables, who had launched it with frightful impetus into space (having borrowed a sum sufficient for the purpose), Maddox, who controlled its course, and Rankin, whose brilliance made it twinkle so brightly in the firmament. With them, but emphatically not of them, was Horace Jewdwine, of Lazarus, who had come up from Oxford to join the staff of *The Museion*.

Jewdwine and Mackinnon, both secure of a position and a salary, looked solemn and a little anxious ; but the men of *The Planet*, having formed themselves into a sort of unlimited liability company, and started a brand new "weekly" of their own (upon no sort of security beyond their bare brains) were as persons without a single care, worry or responsibility. They were exchanging ideas in an off-hand and light-hearted manner, the only stipulation being that the ideas must be new ; for, by some unwritten law of the club, the conversational currency was liable at any moment to be called in.