THE FLORENTINE CHAIR: A COMIC IDYLL

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The Florentine chair: a comic idyll by St. John Lucas

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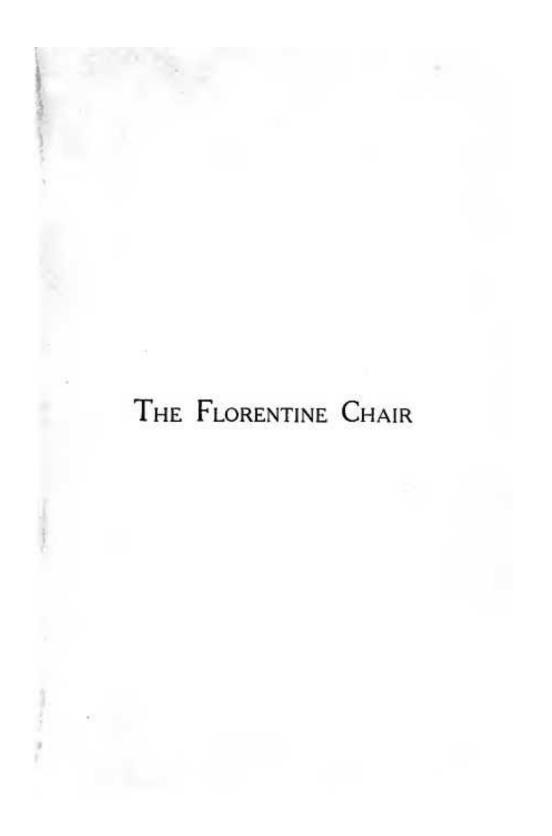
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ST. JOHN LUCAS

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Trieste



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FLORENTINE CHAIR

A COMIC IDYLL

BY ST. JOHN LUCAS

LONDON SIDNEY APPLETON

FREDERICK WARNE & CO. 15, BEDFORD STREET, STRAND

1904

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DESMOND F. T. COKE

IN AFFECTION

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"AH!" said the sexton, with a grim chuckle, "they all go along the churchyard path one time or another, every man and maid of 'em, every wife and widder. Ain't many as get through the world without baptism or burial. Ain't many, even, as get through without marriage."

"Which is the second death," said Raymond, without removing his pipe from his profane lips. "Shakespeare said something the same, with a slightly stronger literary flavour. Every man of your profession should know *Hamlet* by heart."

The sexton laid down his scythe, and mopped his brow with an azure hand-

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kerchief. He was mowing the small meadow that intervened between Raymond's cottage and the churchyard. The sun was at the apex of the cloudless, clear blue dome of the sky, and the sexton's face, like a round red moon, reflected its glory.

Raymond lay in the shade and watched him. Raymond was a hedonist.

"I don't know no tongues," said the sexton : "in my young days there weren't all these new-fangled tricks o' teachin', piano-playin' and the like. I was brought up to my trade, and to my trade I've stuck."

"Adam's profession—the oldest in the world," murmured Raymond.

"I believe yer," said the sexton solemnly.

"Except Eve's," Raymond added.

"Eh?" queried the sexton.

"Being tempted, and tempting," Raymond explained. The sexton began to mow again. Far above him a lark sang its wonderful lyric. The bees boomed among the roses, and in the tall sweet-scented grass small creatures rustled mysteriously.

"It is possible," went on the philosopher beneath the hedge, "that you have never thought very much about the female sex. Only a married man can take women seriously. Have you ever been married, O man of bones?"

"Not I!" replied the sexton with a snort. "Women's a luxury. Not for me, I reckon."

"Your point of view is usually original," said Raymond. "It is obvious that you neither read nor write modern literature. But I think you are wrong, though the error is a kindly one. To pronounce woman a luxury is to excuse—nay, to praise her. The history of humanity proves, however, with distressing logic, that she is as