

# **STRAWS IN THE WIND**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9781760579722

Straws in the Wind by Martin J. McHugh

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**MARTIN J. MCHUGH**

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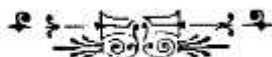
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BY —

MARTIN J. MCHUGH.



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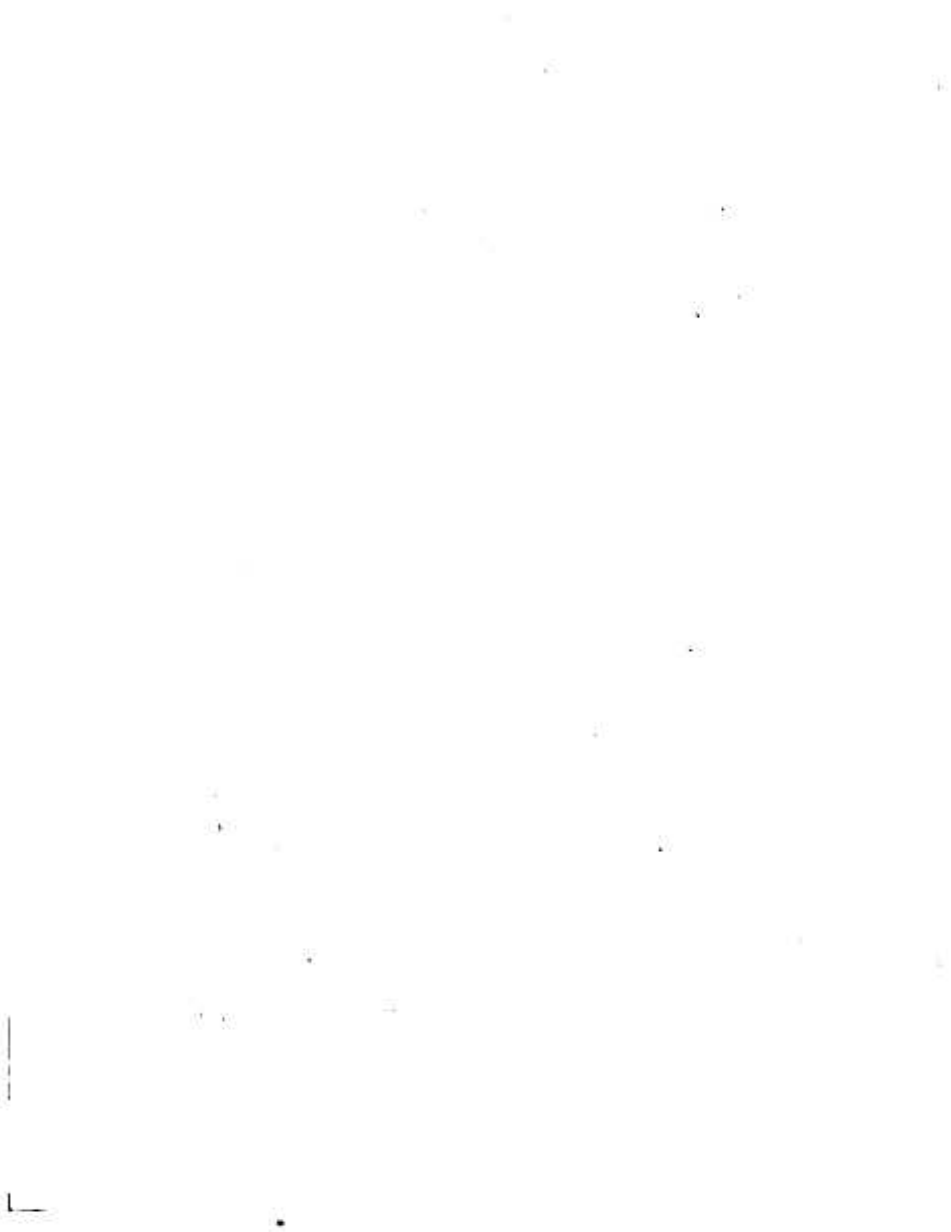
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# Contents

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Chapter	Page
I. STRONGER THAN HONOUR - . . . . .	I
II. NO BRAINS - - - - . . . . .	18
III. A TRAIL OF FIRE - . . . . .	35
IV. A PLUNGE INTO LETHE - - . . . . .	55
V. THE STATUE OF NIOBE - - - - . . . . .	74
VI. A PIPE OF HASHISH - . . . . .	96





*For the favour of a review,  
With the Author's compliments.*

# STRAWS IN THE WIND

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## CHAPTER I.

### STRONGER THAN HONOUR.

IT happened that night that the smoking-room of the club was almost deserted—a somewhat unusual thing. We four were its occupants. Aylworth was standing by the fireplace in a moody attitude, with his elbow resting on the mantelpiece; Hervey lay indolently stretched full length on a sofa, smoking a briar-root, his hands clasped behind his head; and Edmonds and I respectively occupied a couple of comfortable easy-chairs. The evening paper had fallen out of my hands, and, like the rest, I was idly thinking—of what I know not. From the billiard-room above sounded the muffled tramping of feet, which with the voices blurred and indistinct, and the sound of occasional laughter, alone broke the silence—if I do not count Hervey's pipe, which had an irritating trick of wheezing violently at irregular intervals.

"What a peculiar thing is fate!" said Aylworth suddenly. "I wonder are our individual lives governed by any tangible laws."

"I suppose they are," replied Edmonds, but slowly and dubiously.

"Well, they might as well not be, since we do not know those hidden laws," said Aylworth. "The fact that we four, who belonged to the same college of the same university, are sitting here, has just brought to my mind, *apropos* of this question of fate, that we have all in our lives proved my theory. Even our easeful friend Hervey will admit that."

"What theory, though?" asked Hervey, unclasping his hands, and sitting up on the sofa.

"Your memory is short, I fear," returned Aylworth, "but I shall refresh it. Just bring your mind back twenty years, and recall the words I said on the occasion of our last great jubilation in Brown's rooms, the night before we left the university. There were, you will recollect, twelve of you there. I was the thirteenth—the unlucky thirteenth, perhaps; for I sat apart, and was a kind of death's-head at the feast."

He paused, and gave a few long pulls at his cigar.

"I was then fresh from the Law School, you will remember. My studies had been congenial, and I had been a hard and—if I may say it—a very successful reader. Natural bias had made a moral

philosopher of me ; and a moral philosopher never adds gaiety to the festive board. Your carousing irritated me. You jibed at me for my unsociableness ; and then I turned prophet as well as moral philosopher. You were discussing your fine projects and bright prospects, and then I spoke. I told you that we were all straws in the wind in this world, practically helpless as to where the storms of life might whirl us, or its calms leave us. And then you found that you had had enough of me, and so you practically turned me out ; but before I left I told you that most of you would find in after life that my words would come true. Which of you can now disprove my prophecy ? ”

He turned and contemplated us. In his eyes was the light of a half-malicious triumph, while every line of his unusually hard and cold features was charged with the same expression.

And we sat silent, unable to combat his words. For the world had, indeed, not turned out to be the world of our youth's dreams and hopes. As I, for one, recalled those wonderful projects to which he alluded, I would have smiled, but that there was something sad in those unfulfilled dreams which checked amusement even at the thought of their extravagance. And now that we were confronted with their memory, we could not deny that we, at any rate, had suffered strange things at the hand of fate ; that none of us there had followed the path