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INTRODUCTORY

THE life of Tom L. Johnson contains the elements of an ancient Greek tragedy. It is intensely human, a great psychological drama. Its outward activities belong to our days and to the future, its inner workings were those of a multiplex nature difficult to comprehend, and misunderstood by most of us. He was never vanquished by his enemies, but fell a victim to himself.

Partisan hatred and partisan friendship obscured not only the real man, but also his aims and his work. As a politician he made of his enemies a pack of wolves, of his friends a herd of sheep. He himself was a good hater and a good friend. His methods staggered the class of men among which he was counted, but to which he never belonged, and delighted the common people, of whom he was one in his democratic way. Yet, he was

iii

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not without aloofness. He bubbled over with a selfish joy of living, and of fighting for the betterment of political and social conditions. Standing with both feet in the present, the past had little meaning for him. His penetration into the future was marvellous. Fear of men he knew not, and he was at home at the house of the great as well as in the hut of the humblest. His courage of his convictions was above suspicion, but not so his love for veracity. Truth, half-truth and untruth were sometimes matters of expediency with him, as with most politicians, and even with statesmen. Yet he was very quick to resent a doubt in his word, which rather proves the assertion. He took a delight in domination over men, and it was an honest delight, well founded upon his superior intellect and his great will power. There was something of the daring speculator in him and of the gambler who can lose a stake with a smile.

He entered public life after having made a large fortune, with the firm resolution to

devote the rest of his days to the welfare of the people. Full of new ideas, he soon met with the active and passive opposition of the men who were satisfied with the existing order of things. His great political battles, his dogged fight against the street railway monopoly, his attacks upon privileged classes of all kinds, his exertions in behalf of municipal reforms, his utter disregard of conventionalities, made him a most picturesque figure in public affairs.

Ten years ago he announced the programme of our politicians of to-day and was derided as a Socialist. His keen foresight perceived the possibilities of an awakening of the people to a new era of sociological activity. Salvation he believed must come from the cities and their people. Nothing could be expected from the rich. He knew the "system" from personal experience and attacked it. The ballot box was his weapon. His brilliant mind was capable of grasping any question, yet time proved that he lacked the qualities of the really strong to achieve

great success. He lost himself in an eddy and was swallowed, his heart's work unfinished, almost undone. Here was an example of the self-made man falling short of achievement of the results of his opportunities.

At the height of his career he was mentioned as a presidential possibility, and there is little doubt that he cherished the same hopes as his friends. He was never lacking in self-confidence. At that time the speculator awakened in him. He became a political plunger—and lost. The incident, after all, was of minor importance, measured by his life-work and the aims of his programme. If the latter were dictated by political ambition, personal failure was inevitable, but the result of the work remains—and cannot be brushed aside.

Pathetic in the extreme was his final defeat, his family misfortunes, his sickness, and his heroic fight with incurable disease. "I do not like to be an ex," he said, when obliged to step down and out, and the words were characteristic of the whole man.