

SLEEPING FIRES

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Sleeping fires by George Gissing

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George Gissing

SLEEPING FIRES

BY

GEORGE GISSING

AUTHOR OF

"THE ODD WOMEN," "EVE'S
RANSOM," &c.



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SLEEPING FIRES.

I.



HE rain was over. As he sat reading Langley saw the page illumined with a flood of sunshine, which warmed his face and hand. For a few minutes he read on, then closed his Aristophanes with a laugh—faint echo of the laughter of more than two thousand years ago.

He had passed the winter at Athens, occupying rooms, chosen for the

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prospects they commanded, in a hotel unknown to his touring countrymen, where the waiters had no English, and only a smattering of French or Italian. No economic necessity constrained him. Within sight of the Acropolis he did not care to be constantly reminded of Piccadilly or the Boulevard—that was all. He consumed *pilafi* and meats generously enriched with the native oil, drank resinated wine, talked such Greek as Heaven permitted. At two and forty, whether by choice or pressure of circumstance, a man may be doing worse.

The cup and plate of his early breakfast were still on the table, with volumes many, in many languages, heaped about them. Langley looked at his watch, rose with deliberation, stretched himself, and walked to the window. Hence, at a southern angle, he saw the Parthenon, honey-coloured against a violet sky, and at the opposite limit of his view the peak of

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Lycabettus ; between and beyond, through the pellucid air which at once reveals and softens its barren ruggedness, Hymettus basking in the light of spring. He could not grow weary of such a scene, which he had watched through changes innumerable of magic gleam and shade since the sunsets of autumn fired it with solemn splendour ; but his gaze this morning was directed merely by habit. With the laugh he had forgotten Aristophanes, and now, as his features told, was possessed with thought of some modern, some personal interest, a care, it seemed, and perchance that one, woven into the fabric of his life, which accounted for deep lines on a face otherwise expressing the contentment of manhood in its prime.

A second time he consulted his watch—perhaps because he had no appointment, nor any call whatever upon his time. Then he left the room, crossed a corridor, and entered