

# **The Mountebank**

William John Locke

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In the month of June, 1919, I received a long letter from Brigadier-General Andrew Lackaday together with a bulky manuscript. The letter, addressed from an obscure hotel in Marseilles, ran as follows:-- MY DEAR FRIEND, On the occasion of our last meeting when I kept you up to an ungodly hour of the morning with the story of my wretched affairs to which you patiently listened without seeming bored, you were good enough to suggest that I might write a book about myself, not for the sake of vulgar advertisement, but in order to interest, perhaps to encourage, at any rate to stimulate the thoughts of many of my old comrades who have been placed in the same predicament as myself. Well, I can't do it. You're a professional man of letters and don't appreciate the extraordinary difficulty a layman has, not only in writing a coherent narrative, but in composing the very sentences which express the things that he wants to convey. Add to this that English is to me, if not a foreign, at any rate, a secondary language--I have thought all my life in French, so that to express myself clearly on any except the humdrum affairs of life is always a conscious effort. Even this little prelude, in my best style, has taken me nearly two cigarettes to write; so I gave up an impossible task



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