The Importance of Being Earnest A Trivial Comedy for Serious People by Oscar Wilde. THE PERSONS IN THE PLAY John Worthing, J.P. Algernon Moncrieff Rev. Canon Chasuble, D.D. Merriman, Butler Lane, Manservant Lady Bracknell Hon. Gwendolen Fairfax Cecily Cardew Miss Prism, Governess THE SCENES OF THE PLAY ACT I. Algernon Moncrieff's Flat in Half-Moon Street, W. ACT II. The Garden at the Manor House, Woolton. ACT III. Drawing-Room at the Manor House, Woolton. TIME: The Present. LONDON: ST. JAMES'S THEATRE Lessee and Manager: Mr. George Alexander February 14th, 1895 John Worthing, J.P.: Mr. George Alexander. Algernon Moncrieff: Mr. Allen Aynesworth. Rev. Canon Chasuble, D.D.: Mr. H. H. Vincent. Merriman: Mr. Frank Dyall. Lane: Mr. F. Kinsey Peile. Lady Bracknell: Miss Rose Leclercq. Hon. Gwendolen Fairfax: Miss Irene Vanbrugh. Cecily Cardew: Miss Evelyn Millard. Miss Prism: Mrs. George Canninge. FIRST ACT SCENE Morning-room in Algernon's flat in Half-Moon Street. The room is luxuriously and artistically furnished. The sound of a piano is heard in the adjoining room. [Lane is arranging afternoon tea on the table, and after the music has ceased, Algernon enters.] Algernon. Did you hear what I was playing, Lane? Lane. I didn't think it polite to listen, sir. Algernon. I'm sorry for that, for your sake. I don't play accurately--any one can play accurately--but I play with wonderful expression. As far as the piano is concerned, sentiment is my forte. I keep science for Life. Lane. Yes, sir. Algernon. And, speaking of the science of Life, have you got the cucumber sandwiches cut for Lady Bracknell? Lane. Yes, sir. [Hands them on a salver.] Algernon. [Inspects them, takes two, and sits down on the sofa.] Oh! . . . by the way, Lane, I see from your book that on Thursday night, when Lord Shoreman and Mr. Worthing were dining with me, eight bottles of champagne are entered as having been consumed. Lane. Yes, sir; eight bottles and a pint. Algernon. Why is it that at a bachelor's establishment the servants invariably drink the champagne? I ask merely for information. Lane. I attribute it to the superior quality of the wine, sir. I have often observed that in married households the champagne is rarely of a first-rate brand. Algernon. Good heavens! Is marriage so demoralising as that? Lane. I believe it is a very pleasant state, sir. I have had very little experience of it myself up to the present. I have only been married once. That was in consequence of a misunderstanding between myself and a young person. Algernon. [Languidly.] I don't know that I am much interested in your family life, Lane. Lane. No, sir; it is not a very interesting subject. I never think of it myself. Algernon. Very natural, I am sure. That will do, Lane, thank you. Lane. Thank you, sir. [Lane goes out.] Algernon. Lane's views on marriage seem somewhat lax. Really, if the lower orders don't set us a good example, what on earth is the use of them? They seem, as a class, to have absolutely no sense of moral responsibility. [Enter Lane.] Lane. Mr. Ernest Worthing. [Enter Jack.] [Lane goes out.] Algernon. How are you, my dear Ernest? What brings you up to town? Jack. Oh, pleasure, pleasure! What else should bring one anywhere? Eating as usual, I see, Algy! Algernon. [Stiffly.] I believe it is customary in good society to take some slight refreshment at five o'clock. Where have you been since last Thursday? Jack. [Sitting down on the sofa.] In the country. Algernon. What on earth do you do there? Jack. [Pulling off his gloves.] When one is in town one amuses oneself. When one is in the country one amuses other people. It is excessively boring. Algernon. And who are the people you amuse? Jack. [Airily.] Oh, neighbours, neighbours. Algernon. Got nice neighbours in your part of Shropshire? Jack. Perfectly horrid! Never speak to one of them. Algernon. How immensely you must amuse them! [Goes over and takes sandwich.] By the way, Shropshire is your county, is it not? Jack. Eh? Shropshire? Yes, of course. Hallo! Why all these cups? Why cucumber sandwiches? Why such reckless extravagance in one so young? Who is coming to tea? Algernon. Oh! merely Aunt Augusta and Gwendolen. Jack. How perfectly delightful! Algernon. Yes, that is all very well; but I am afraid Aunt Augusta won't quite approve of your being here. Jack. May I ask why? Algernon. My dear fellow, the way you flirt with Gwendolen is perfectly disgraceful. It is almost as bad as the way Gwendolen flirts with you. Jack. I am in love with Gwendolen. I have come up to town expressly to propose to her. Algernon. I thought you had come up for pleasure? . . . I call that business. Jack. How utterly unromantic you are! Algernon. I really don't see anything romantic in proposing. It is very romantic to be in love. But there is nothing romantic about a definite proposal. Why, one may be accepted. One usually is, I believe. Then the excitement is all over. The very essence of romance is uncertainty. If ever I get married, I'll certainly try to forget the fact. Jack. I have no doubt about that, dear Algy. The Divorce Court was specially invented for people whose memories are so curiously constituted. Algernon. Oh! there is no use speculating on that subject. Divorces are made in Heaven--[Jack puts out his hand to take a sandwich. Algernon at once interferes.] Please don't touch the cucumber sandwiches. They are ordered specially for Aunt Augusta. [Takes one and eats it.] Jack. Well, you have been eating them all the time. Algernon. That is quite a different matter. She is my aunt. [Takes plate from below.] Have some bread and butter. The bread and butter is for Gwendolen. Gwendolen is devoted to bread and butter. Jack. [Advancing to table and helping himself.] And very good bread and butter it is too. Algernon. Well, my dear fellow, you need not eat as if you were going to eat it all. You behave as if you were married to her already. You are not married to her already, and I don't think you ever will be. Jack. Why on earth do you say that? Algernon. Well, in the first place girls never marry the men they flirt with. Girls don't think it right. Jack. Oh, that is nonsense! Algernon. It isn't. It is a great truth. It accounts for the extraordinary number of bachelors that one sees all over the place. In the second place, I don't give my consent. Jack. Your consent! Algernon. My dear fellow, Gwendolen is my first cousin. And before I allow you to marry her, you will have to clear up the whole question of Cecily. [Rings bell.] Jack. Cecily! What on earth do you mean? What do you mean, Algy, by Cecily! I don't know any one of the name of Cecily. [Enter Lane.] Algernon. Bring me that cigarette case Mr. Worthing left in the smoking- room the last time he dined here. Lane. Yes, sir. [Lane goes out.] Jack. Do you mean to say you have had my cigarette case all this time? I wish to goodness you had let me know. I have been writing frantic letters to Scotland Yard about it. I was very nearly offering a large reward. Algernon. Well, I wish you would offer one. I happen to be more than usually hard up. Jack. There is no good offering a large reward now that the thing is found. [Enter Lane with the cigarette case on a salver. Algernon takes it at once. Lane goes out.] Algernon. I think that is rather mean of you, Ernest, I must say. [Opens case and examines it.] However, it makes no matter, for, now that I look at the inscription inside, I find that the thing isn't yours after all. Jack. Of course it's mine. [Moving to him.] You have seen me with it a hundred times, and you have no right whatsoever to read what is written inside. It is a very ungentlemanly thing to read a private cigarette case. Algernon. Oh! it is absurd to have a hard and fast rule about what one should read and what one shouldn't. More than half of modern culture depends on what one shouldn't read. Jack. I am quite aware of the fact, and I don't propose to discuss modern culture. It isn't the sort of thing one should talk of in private. I simply want my cigarette case back. Algernon. Yes; but this isn't your cigarette case. This cigarette case is a present from some one of the name of Cecily, and you said you didn't know any one of that name. Jack. Well, if you want to know, Cecily happens to be my aunt. Algernon. Your aunt! Jack. Yes. Charming old lady she is, too. Lives at Tunbridge Wells. Just give it back to me, Algy. Algernon. [Retreating to back of sofa.] But why does she call herself little Cecily if she is your aunt and lives at Tunbridge Wells? [Reading.] 'From little Cecily with her fondest love.' Jack. [Moving to sofa and kneeling upon it.] My dear fellow, what on earth is there in that? Some aunts are tall, some aunts are not tall. That is a matter that surely an aunt may be allowed to decide for herself. You seem to think that every aunt should be exactly like your aunt! That is absurd! For Heaven's sake give me back my cigarette case. [Follows Algernon round the room.] Algernon. Yes. But why does your aunt call you her uncle? 'From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack.' There is no objection, I admit, to an aunt being a small aunt, but why an aunt, no matter what her size may be, should call her own nephew her uncle, I can't quite make out. Besides, your name isn't Jack at all; it is Ernest. Jack. It isn't Ernest; it's Jack. Algernon. You have always told me it was Ernest. I have introduced you to every one as Ernest. You answer to the name of Ernest. You look as if your name was Ernest. You are the most earnest-looking person I ever saw in my life. It is perfectly absurd your saying that your name isn't Ernest. It's on your cards. Here is one of them. [Taking it from case.] 'Mr. Ernest Worthing, B. 4, The Albany.' I'll keep this as a proof that your name is Ernest if ever you attempt to deny it to me, or to Gwendolen, or to any one else. [Puts the card in his pocket.] Jack. Well, my name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country, and the cigarette case was given to me in the country. Algernon. Yes, but that does not account for the fact that your small Aunt Cecily, who lives at Tunbridge Wells, calls you her dear uncle. Come, old boy, you had much better have the thing out at once. Jack. My dear Algy, you talk exactly as if you were a dentist. It is very vulgar to talk like a dentist when one isn't a dentist. It produces a false impression. Algernon. Well, that is exactly what dentists always do. Now, go on! Tell me the whole thing. I may mention that I have always suspected you of being a confirmed and secret Bunburyist; and I am quite sure of it now. Jack. Bunburyist? What on earth do you mean by a Bunburyist? Algernon. I'll reveal to you the meaning of that incomparable expression as soon as you are kind enough to inform me why you are Ernest in town and Jack in the country. Jack. Well, produce my cigarette case first. Algernon. Here it is. [Hands cigarette case .] Now produce your explanation, and pray make it improbable. [Sits on sofa.] Jack. My dear fellow, there is nothing improbable about my explanation at all. In fact it's perfectly ordinary. Old Mr. Thomas Cardew, who adopted me when I was a little boy, made me in his will guardian to his grand-daughter, Miss Cecily Cardew. Cecily, who addresses me as her uncle from motives of respect that you could not possibly appreciate, lives at my place in the country under the charge of her admirable governess, Miss Prism. Algernon. Where is that place in the country, by the way? Jack. That is nothing to you, dear boy. You are not going to be invited . . . I may tell you candidly that the place is not in Shropshire. Algernon. I suspected that, my dear fellow! I have Bunburyed all over Shropshire on two separate occasions. Now, go on. Why are you Ernest in town and Jack in the country? Jack. My dear Algy, I don't know whether you will be able to understand my real motives. You are hardly serious enough. When one is placed in the position of guardian, one has to adopt a very high moral tone on all subjects. It's one's duty to do so. And as a high moral tone can hardly be said to conduce very much to either one's health or one's happiness, in order to get up to town I have always pretended to have a younger brother of the name of Ernest, who lives in the Albany, and gets into the most dreadful scrapes. That, my dear Algy, is the whole truth pure and simple. Algernon. The truth is rarely pure and never simple. Modern life would be very tedious if it were either, and modern literature a complete impossibility! Jack. That wouldn't be at all a bad thing. Algernon. Literary criticism is not your forte, my dear fellow. Don't try it. You should leave that to people who haven't been at a University. They do it so well in the daily papers. What you really are is a Bunburyist. I was quite right in saying you were a Bunburyist. You are one of the most advanced Bunburyists I know. Jack. What on earth do you mean? Algernon. You have invented a very useful younger brother called Ernest, in order that you may be able to come up to town as often as you like. I have invented an invaluable permanent invalid called Bunbury, in order that I may be able to go down into the country whenever I choose. Bunbury is perfectly invaluable. If it wasn't for Bunbury's extraordinary bad health, for instance, I wouldn't be able to dine with you at Willis's to-night, for I have been really engaged to Aunt Augusta for more than a week. Jack. I haven't asked you to dine with me anywhere to-night. Algernon. I know. You are absurdly careless about sending out invitations. It is very foolish of you. Nothing annoys people so much as not receiving invitations. Jack. You had much better dine with your Aunt Augusta. Algernon. I haven't the smallest intention of doing anything of the kind. To begin with, I dined there on Monday, and once a week is quite enough to dine with one's own relations. In the second place, whenever I do dine there I am always treated as a member of the family, and sent down with either no woman at all, or two. In the third place, I know perfectly well whom she will place me next to, to-night. She will place me next Mary Farquhar, who always flirts with her own husband across the dinner-table. That is not very pleasant. Indeed, it is not even decent . . . and that sort of thing is enormously on the increase. The amount of women in London who flirt with their own husbands is perfectly scandalous. It looks so bad. It is simply washing one's clean linen in public. Besides, now that I know you to be a confirmed Bunburyist I naturally want to talk to you about Bunburying. I want to tell you the rules. Jack. I'm not a Bunburyist at all. If Gwendolen accepts me, I am going to kill my brother, indeed I think I'll kill him in any case. Cecily is a little too much interested in him. It is rather a bore. So I am going to get rid of Ernest. And I strongly advise you to do the same with Mr. . . . with your invalid friend who has the absurd name. Algernon. Nothing will induce me to part with Bunbury, and if you ever get married, which seems to me extremely problematic, you will be very glad to know Bunbury. A man who marries without knowing Bunbury has a very tedious time of it. Jack. That is nonsense. If I marry a charming girl like Gwendolen, and she is the only girl I ever saw in my life that I would marry, I certainly won't want to know Bunbury. Algernon. Then your wife will. You don't seem to realise, that in married life three is company and two is none. Jack. [Sententiously.] That, my dear young friend, is the theory that the corrupt French Drama has been propounding for the last fifty years. Algernon. Yes; and that the happy English home has proved in half the time. Jack. For heaven's sake, don't try to be cynical. It's perfectly easy to be cynical. Algernon. My dear fellow, it isn't easy to be anything nowadays. There's such a lot of beastly competition about. [The sound of an electric bell is heard.] Ah! that must be Aunt Augusta. Only relatives, or creditors, ever ring in that Wagnerian manner. Now, if I get her out of the way for ten minutes, so that you can have an opportunity for proposing to Gwendolen, may I dine with you to-night at Willis's? Jack. I suppose so, if you want to. Algernon. Yes, but you must be serious about it. I hate people who are not serious about meals. It is so shallow of them. [Enter Lane.] Lane. Lady Bracknell and Miss Fairfax. [Algernon goes forward to meet them. Enter Lady Bracknell and Gwendolen.] Lady Bracknell. Good afternoon, dear Algernon, I hope you are behaving very well. Algernon. I'm feeling very well, Aunt Augusta. Lady Bracknell. That's not quite the same thing. In fact the two things rarely go together. [Sees Jack and bows to him with icy coldness.] Algernon. [To Gwendolen.] Dear me, you are smart! Gwendolen. I am always smart! Am I not, Mr. Worthing? Jack. You're quite perfect, Miss Fairfax. Gwendolen. Oh! I hope I am not that. It would leave no room for developments, and I intend to develop in many directions. [Gwendolen and Jack sit down together in the corner.] Lady Bracknell. I'm sorry if we are a little late, Algernon, but I was obliged to call on dear Lady Harbury. I hadn't been there since her poor husband's death. I never saw a woman so altered; she looks quite twenty years younger. And now I'll have a cup of tea, and one of those nice cucumber sandwiches you promised me. Algernon. Certainly, Aunt Augusta. [Goes over to tea-table.] Lady Bracknell. Won't you come and sit here, Gwendolen? Gwendolen. Thanks, mamma, I'm quite comfortable where I am. Algernon. [Picking up empty plate in horror.] Good heavens! Lane! Why are there no cucumber sandwiches? I ordered them specially. Lane. [Gravely.] There were no cucumbers in the market this morning, sir. I went down twice. Algernon. No cucumbers! Lane. No, sir. Not even for ready money. Algernon. That will do, Lane, thank you. Lane. Thank you, sir. [Goes out.] Algernon. I am greatly distressed, Aunt Augusta, about there being no cucumbers, not even for ready money. Lady Bracknell. It really makes no matter, Algernon. I had some crumpets with Lady Harbury, who seems to me to be living entirely for pleasure now. Algernon. I hear her hair has turned quite gold from grief . Lady Bracknell. It certainly has changed its colour. From what cause I, of course, cannot say. [Algernon crosses and hands tea.] Thank you. I've quite a treat for you to-night, Algernon. I am going to send you down with Mary Farquhar. She is such a nice woman, and so attentive to her husband. It's delightful to watch them. Algernon. I am afraid, Aunt Augusta, I shall have to give up the pleasure of dining with you to-night after all. Lady Bracknell. [Frowning.] I hope not, Algernon. It would put my table co mpletely out. Your uncle would have to dine upstairs. Fortunately he is accustomed to that. Algernon. It is a great bore, and, I need hardly say, a terrible disappointment to me, but the fact is I have just had a telegram to say th at my poor friend Bunbury is very ill again. [Exchange s glances with Jack.] They seem to think I should be with him. Lady Bracknell. It is very strange. This Mr. Bunbury seems to suffer from curiously bad health. Algernon. Yes; poor Bunbury is a dreadful invalid. Lady Bracknell. Well, I must say, Algernon, that I think it is high time that Mr. Bunbury made up his mind whether he was going to live or to die. This shilly-shallying with the question is absurd. Nor do I in any way approve of the modern sympathy with invalids. I consider it morbid. Illness of any kind is hardly a thing to be encouraged in others. Health is the primary duty of life. I am always telling that to your poor uncle, but he never seems to take much notice . . . as far as any improvement in his ailment goes. I should be much obliged if you would ask Mr. Bunbury, from me, to be kind enough not to have a relapse on Saturday, for I rely on you to arrange my music for me. It is my last reception, and one wants something that will encourage conversation, particularly at the end of the season when every one has practically said whatever they had to say, which, in most cases, was probably not much. Algernon. I'll speak to Bunbury, Aunt Augusta, if he is still conscious, and I think I can promise you he'll be all right by Saturday. Of course the music is a great difficulty. You see, if one plays good music, people don't listen, and if one plays bad music people don't talk. But I'll run over the programme I've drawn out, if you will kindly come into the next room for a moment. Lady Bracknell. Thank you, Algernon. It is very thoughtful of you. [Rising, and following Algernon.] I'm sure the programme will be delightful, after a few expurgations. French songs I cannot possibly allow. People always seem to think that they are improper, and either look shocked, which is vulgar, or laugh, which is worse. But German sounds a thoroughly respectable language, and indeed, I believe is so. Gwendolen, you will accompany me. Gwendolen. Certainly, mamma. [Lady Bracknell and Algernon go into the music-room, Gwendolen remains behind.] Jack. Charming day it has been, Miss Fairfax. Gwendolen. Pray don't talk to me about the weather, Mr. Worthing. Whenever people talk to me about the weather, I always feel quite certain that they mean something else. And that makes me so nervous. Jack. I do mean something else. Gwendolen. I thought so. In fact, I am never wrong. Jack. And I would like to be allowed to take advantage of Lady Bracknell's temporary absence . . . Gwendolen. I would certainly advise you to do so. Mamma has a way of coming back suddenly into a room that I have often had to speak to her about. Jack. [Nervously.] Miss Fairfax, ever since I met you I have admired you more than any girl . . . I have ever met since I met you. Gwendolen. Yes, I am quite well aware of the fact. And I often wish that in public, at any rate, you had been more demonstrative. For me you have always had an irresistible fascination. Even before I met you I was far from indifferent to you. [Jack looks at her in amazement.] We live, as I hope you know, Mr. Worthing, in an age of ideals. The fact is constantly mentioned in the more expensive monthly magazines, and has reached the provincial pulpits, I am told; and my ideal has always been to love some one of the name of Ernest. There is something in that name that inspires absolute confidence. The moment Algernon first mentioned to me that he had a friend called Ernest, I knew I was destined to love you. Jack. You really love me, Gwendolen? Gwendolen. Passionately! Jack. Darling! You don't know how happy you've made me. Gwendolen. My own Ernest! Jack. But you don't really mean to say that you couldn't love me if my name wasn't Ernest? Gwendolen. But your name is Ernest. Jack. Yes, I know it is. But supposing it was something else? Do you mean to say you couldn't love me then? Gwendolen. [Glibly.] Ah! that is clearly a metaphysical speculation, and like most metaphysical speculations has very little reference at all to the actual facts of real life, as we know them. Jack. Personally, darling, to speak quite candidly, I don't much care about the name of Ernest . . . I don't think the name suits me at all. Gwendolen. It suits you perfectly. It is a divine name. It has a music of its own. It produces vibrations. Jack. Well, really, Gwendolen, I must say that I think there are lots of other much nicer names. I think Jack, for instance, a charming name. Gwendolen. Jack? . . . No, there is very little music in the name Jack, if any at all, indeed. It does not thrill. It produces absolutely no vibrations . . . I have known several Jacks, and they all, without exception, were more than usually plain. Besides, Jack is a notorious domestic cit y for John! And I pity any woman who is married to a man called John. She would probably never be allowed to know the entrancing pleasure of a single moment's solitude. The only really safe name is Ernest. Jack. Gwendolen, I must get christened at once- I mean we must get t m arried at once. There is no time to be lost. Gwendolen . Married, Mr. Worthing? Jack. [Astounded.] Well . . . surely. You know that I love you, and you led me to believe, Miss Fairfax, that you were not absolutely indifferent to me. Gwendolen. I a d or e you. But you haven't proposed to me yet. Nothing has been said at all about marriage. The subject has not even been touched on. Jack. Well . . . may I propose to you now? Gwendolen. I think it would be an admirable opportunity. And to spare you a ny possible disappointment, Mr. Worthing, I think it only fair to tell you quite frankly before-hand that I am fully determined to accept you. Jack. Gwendolen! Gwendolen. Yes, Mr. Worthing, what have you got to say to me? Jack. You know what I have got to say to you . Gwendolen. Yes, but you don't say it. Jack. Gwendolen, will you marry me? [Goes on his knees.] Gwendolen. Of course I will, darling. How long you have been about it! I am afraid you have had very little experience in how to propose. Jack. My own one, I have never loved any one in the world but you. Gwendolen. Yes, but men often propose for practice. I know my brother Gerald does. All my girl-friends tell me so. What wonderfully blue eyes you have, Ernest! They are quite, quite, blue. I hope you will always look at me just like that, especially when there are other people present. [Enter Lady Bracknell.] Lady Bracknell. Mr. Worthing! Rise, sir, from this semi-recumbent posture. It is most indecorous. Gwendolen. Mamma! [He tries to rise; she restrains him.] I must beg you to retire. This is no place for you. Besides, Mr. Worthing has not quite finished yet. Lady Bracknell. Finished what, may I ask? Gwendolen. I am engaged to Mr. Worthing, mamma. [They rise together.] Lady Bracknell. Pardon me, you are not engaged to any one. When you do become engaged to some one, I, or your father, should be informed, and then your mother should be informed, and then I should be informed, and then I should have a few questions to put to you, Mr. Worthing. While I am making these inquiries, you, Gwendolen, will wait for me below in the carriage. Gwendolen. [Reproachfully.] Mamma! Lady Bracknell. In the carriage, Gwendolen! [Gwendolen goes to the door. She and Jack blow kisses to each other behind Lady Bracknell's back. Lady Bracknell looks vaguely about as if she could not understand what the noise was. Finally turns round.] Gwendolen, the carriage! Gwendolen. Yes, mamma. [Goes out, looking back at Jack.] Lady Bracknell. [Sitting down.] You can take a seat, Mr. Worthing. [Looks in her pocket for note-book and pencil.] Jack. Thank you, Lady Bracknell, I prefer standing. Lady Bracknell. [Pencil and note-book in hand.] I feel bound to tell you that you are not down on my list of eligible young men, although I have the same list as the dear Duchess of Bolton has. We work together, in fact. However, I am quite ready to enter your name, should your answers be what a really affectionate mother requires. Do you smoke? Jack. Well, yes, I must admit I smoke. Lady Bracknell. I am glad to hear it. A man should always have an occupation of some kind. There are far too many idle men in London as it is. How old are you? Jack. Twenty-nine. Lady Bracknell. A very good age to be married at. I have always been of opinion that a man who desires to get married should know either everything or nothing. Which do you know? Jack. [After some hesitation.] I know nothing, Lady Bracknell. Lady Bracknell. I am pleased to hear it. I do not approve of anything that tampers with natural ignorance. Ignorance is like a delicate exotic fruit; touch it and the bloom is gone. The whole theory of modern education is radically unsound. Fortunately in England, at any rate, education produces no effect whatsoever. If it did, it would prove a serious danger to the upper classes, and probably lead to acts of violence in Grosvenor Square. What is your income? Jack. Between seven and eight thousand a year. Lady Bracknell. [Makes a note in her book.] In land, or in investments? Jack. In investments, chiefly. Lady Bracknell. That is satisfactory. What between the duties expected of one during one's life, and the duties exacted from one after one's death, land has ceased to be either a profit or a pleasure. It gives one position, and prevents one from keeping it up. That's all that can be said about land. Jack. I have a country house with some land, of course, attached to it, about fifteen hundred acres, I believe; but I don't depend on that for my real income. In fact, as far as I can make out, the poachers are the only people who make anything out of it. Lady Bracknell. A country house! How many bedrooms? Well, that point can be cleared up afterwards. You have a town house, I hope? A girl with a simple, unspoiled nature, like Gwendolen, could hardly be expected to reside in the country. Jack. Well, I own a house in Belgrave Square, but it is let by the year to Lady Bloxham. Of course, I can get it back whenever I like, at six months' notice. Lady Bracknell. Lady Bloxham? I don't know her. Jack. Oh, she goes about very little. She is a lady considerably advanced in years. Lady Bracknell. Ah, now at days that is no guarantee of respectability of character. What number in Belgrave Square? Jack. 149. Lady Bracknell. [Shaking her head.] The unfashionable side. I thought there was something. However, that could easily be altered. Jack. Do you mean the fashionable side. Lady Bracknell. [Sternly.] Both, if necessary, I presume. What are your politics? Jack. Well, I am afraid I really have none. I am a Liberal Unionist. Lady Bracknell. Oh, they count as Tories. They dine with us. Or come in the evening, at any rate. Now to minor matters. Are your parents living? Jack. I have lost both my parents. Lady Bracknell. To lose one parent, Mr. Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness. Whose was your father? He was evidently a man of some wealth. Was he born in what the Radical papers call the purple of commerce, or did he rise from the ranks of the aristocracy? Jack. I am afraid I really don't know. The fact is, Lady Bracknell, I said I had lost my parents. It would be nearer the truth to say that my parents seem to have lost me . . . I don't actually know who I am by birth. I was . . . well, I was found. Lady Bracknell. Found! Jack. The late Mr. Thomas Cardew, an old gentleman of a very charitable and kindly disposition, found me, and gave me the name of Worthing, because he happened to have a first-class ticket for Worthing in his pocket at the time. Worthing is a place in Sussex. It is a seaside resort. Lady Bracknell. Where did the charitable gentleman who had a first-class ticket for this seaside resort find you? Jack. [Gravely .] In a hand-bag. Lady Bracknell. A hand-bag? Jack. [Very seriously.] Yes, Lady Bracknell. I was in a hand-bag--a somewhat large, black leather hand-bag, with handles to it--an ordinary hand-bag in fact. Lady Bracknell. In what locality did this Mr. James, or Thomas, Cardew come across his ordinary hand-bag? Jack. In the cloak-room at Victoria Station. It was given to him in mistake for his own. Lady Bracknell. The cloak-room at Victoria Station? Jack. Yes. The Brighton line. Lady Bracknell. The line is immaterial . Mr. Worthing, I confess I feel somewhat bewildered by what you have just told me. To be born, or at any rate bred, in a hand-bag, whether it had handles or not, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life that reminds one of the worst excesses of the French Revolution. And I presume you know what that unfortunate movement led to? As for the particular locality in which the hand-bag was found, a cloak-room at a railway station might serve to conceal a social indiscretion--has probably, indeed, been used for that purpose before now--but it could hardly be regarded as an assured basis for a recognised position in good society. Jack. May I ask you then what you would advise me to do? I need hardly say I would do anything in the world to ensure Gwendolen's happiness. Lady Bracknell. I would strongly advise you, Mr. Worthing, to try and acquire some relations as soon as possible, and to make a definite effort to produce at any rate one parent, of either sex, before the season is quite over. Jack. Well, I don't see how I could possibly manage to do that. I can produce the hand-bag at any moment. It is in my dressing-room at home. I really think that should satisfy you, Lady Bracknell. Lady Bracknell. Me, sir! What has it to do with me? You can hardly imagine that I and Lord Bracknell would dream of allowing our only daughter--a girl brought up with the utmost care--to marry into a cloak- room, and form an alliance with a parcel? Good morning, Mr. Worthing! [Lady Bracknell sweeps out in majestic indignation.] Jack. Good morning! [Algernon, from the other room, strikes up the Wedding March. Jack looks perfectly furious, and goes to the door.] For goodness' sake don't play that ghastly tune, Algy. How idiotic you are! [The music stops and Algernon enters cheerily.] Algernon. Didn't it go off all right, old boy? You don't mean to say Gwendolen refused you? I know she has. She is always refusing people. I think it is most ill-natured of her. Jack. Oh, Gwendolen is as right as a trivet. As far as she is concerned, we are engaged. Her mother is perfectly unbearable. Never met such a Gorgon . . . I don't really know what a Gorgon is like, but I am quite sure that Lady Bracknell is one. In any case, she is a monster, without being a myth, which is rather unfair . . . I beg your pardon, Algy, I suppose I shouldn't talk about your own aunt in that way before you. Algernon. My dear boy, I love hearing my relations abused. It is the only thing that makes me put up with them at all. Relations are simply a tedious pack of people, who haven't got the remotest knowledge of how to live, nor the smallest instinct about when to die. Jack. Oh, that is nonsense! Algernon. It isn't! Jack. Well, I won't argue about the matter. You always want to argue about things. Algernon. That is exactly what things were originally made for. Jack. Upon my word, if I thought that, I'd shoot myself . . . [A pause.] You don't think there is any chance of Gwendolen becoming like her mother in about a hundred and fifty years, do you, Algy? Algernon. All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That's his. Jack. Is that clever? Algernon. It is perfectly phrased! and quite as true as any observation in civilised life should be. Jack. I am sick to death of cleverness. Everybody is clever nowadays. You can't go anywhere without meeting clever people. The thing has become an absolute public nuisance. I wish to goodness we had a few fools left. Algernon. We have. Jack. I should extremely like to meet them. What do they talk about? Algernon. The fools? Oh! about the clever people, of course. Jack. What fools! Algernon. By the way, did you tell Gwendolen the truth about your being Ernest in town, and Jack in the country? Jack. [In a very patronising manner.] My dear fellow, the truth isn't quite the sort of thing one tells to a nice, sweet, refined girl. What extraordinary ideas you have about the way to behave to a woman! Algernon. The only way to behave to a woman is to make love to her, if she is pretty, and to some one else, if she is plain. Jack. Oh, that is nonsense. Algernon. What about your brother? What about the pro fligate Ernest? Jack. Oh, before the end of the week I shall have got rid of him. I'll say he died in Paris of apoplexy. Lots of people die of apoplexy, quite suddenly, don't they? Algernon. Yes, but it's hereditary, my dear fellow. It's a sort of thing that runs in families. You had much better te r say a severe chill. Jack. You are sure a severe chill isn't hereditary, or anything of that kind? Algernon. Of course it isn't! Jack. Very well, then. My poor brother Ernest to carried off suddenly, in Paris, by a severe chill. That gets rid of him. Algernon. But I thought you said that . . . Miss Cardew was a little too much interested in your poor brother Ernest? Won't she feel his loss a good deal? Jack. Oh, that is all right. Cecily is not a silly romantic girl, I am glad to say. She has got a capital appetite, goes long walks, and pays no attention at all to her lessons. Algernon. I would rather like to see Cecily. Jack. I will take very good care you never do. She is excessively pretty, and she is only just eighteen. Algernon. Have you told Gwendolen yet that you have an excessively pretty ward who is only just eighteen? Jack. Oh! one doesn't blurt t he things out to people. Cecily and Gwendolen are perfectly certain to be extremely great friends. I'll bet you anything you like that half an hour after they have met, they will be calling each other sister. Algernon. Women only do that when they have called each other a lot of other things first. Now, my dear boy, if we want to get a good table at Willis's, we really must go and dress. Do you know it is nearly seven? Jack. [Irritably.] Oh! It always is nearly seven. Algernon. Well, I'm hungry . Jack. I never knew you when you weren't . . . Algernon. What shall we do after dinner? Go to o a theatre? Jack. Oh no! I loathe listening. Algernon. Well, let us go to the Club? Jack. Oh, no! I hate talking. Algernon. Well, we might trot round to the Empire at ten? Jack. Oh, no! I can't bear looking at things. It is so silly. Algernon. Well, what shall we do? Jack. Nothing! Algernon. It is awfully hard work doing nothing. However, I don't mind hard work where there is no definite object of any kind. [Enter Lane.] Lane. Miss Fairfax. [Enter Gwendolen. Lane goes out.] Algernon. Gwendolen, upon my word! Gwendolen. Algy, kindly turn your back. I have something very particular to say to Mr. Worthing. Algernon. Really, Gwendolen, I don't think I can allow this at all. Gwendolen. Algy, you always adopt a strictly immoral attitude towards life. You are not quite old enough to do that. [Algernon retires to the fireplace.] Jack. My own darling! Gwendolen. Ernest, we may never be married. From the expression on mamma's face I fear we never shall. Few parents nowadays pay any regard to what their children say to them. The old-fashioned respect for the young is fast dying out. Whatever influence I ever had over mamma, I lost at the age of three. But although she may prevent us from becoming man and wife, and I may marry some one else, and marry often, nothing that she can possibly do can alter my eternal devotion to you. Jack. Dear Gwendolen! Gwendolen. The story of your romantic origin, as related to me by mamma, with unpleasing comments, has naturally stirred the deeper fibres of my nature. Your Christian name has an irresistible fascination. The simplicity of your character makes you exquisitely incomprehensible to me. Your town address at the Albany I have. What is your address in the country? Jack. The Manor House, Woolton, Hertfordshire. [Algernon, who has been carefully listening, smiles to himself, and writes the address on his shirt-cuff. Then picks up the Railway Guide.] Gwendolen. There is a good postal service, I suppose? It may be necessary to do something desperate. That of course will require serious consideration. I will communicate with you daily. Jack. My own one! Gwendolen. How long do you remain in town? Jack. Till Monday. Gwendolen. Good! Algy, you may turn round now. Algernon. Thanks, I've turned round already. Gwendolen. You may also ring the bell. Jack. You will let me see you to your carriage, my own darling? Gwendolen. Certainly. Jack. [To Lane, who now enters.] I will see Miss Fairfax out. Lane. Yes, sir. [Jack and Gwendolen go off.] [Lane presents several letters on a salver to Algernon. It is to be surmised that they are bills, as Algernon, after looking at the envelopes, tears them up.] Algernon. A glass of sherry, Lane. Lane. Yes, sir. Algernon. To-morrow, Lane, I'm going Bunburying. Lane. Yes, sir. Algernon. I shall probably not be back till Monday. You can put up my dress clothes, my smoking jacket, and all the Bunbury suits . . . Lane. Yes, sir. [Handing sherry.] Algernon. I hope to-morrow will be a fine day, Lane. Lane. It never is, sir. Algernon. Lane, you're a perfect pessimist. Lane. I do my best to give satisfaction, sir. [Enter Jack. Lane goes off.] Jack. There's a sensible, intellectual girl! the only girl I ever carried for in my life. [Algernon is laughing immoderately.] What on earth are you so amused at? Algernon. Oh, I'm a little anxious about poor Bunbury, that is all. Jack. If you don't take care, your friend Bunbury will get you into a serious scrape some day . Algernon. I love scrapes. They are the only things that are never serious. Jack. Oh, that's nonsense, Algy. You never talk anything but nonsense. Algernon. Nobody ever does. [Jack looks indignantly at him, and leaves the room. Algernon lights a cigarette, reads his shirt-cuff, and smiles.] ACT DROP SECOND ACT SCENE Garden at the Manor House. A flight of grey stone steps leads up to the house. The garden, an old-fashioned one, full of roses. Time of year, July. Basket chairs, and a table covered with books, are set under a large yew-tree. [Miss Prism discovered seated at the table. Cecily is at the back watering flowers.] Miss Prism. [Calling.] Cecily, Cecily! Surely such a utilitarian occupation as the watering of flowers is rather Moulton's duty than yours? Especially at a moment when intellectual pleasures await you. Your German grammar is on the table. Pray open it at page fifteen. We will repeat yesterday's lesson. Cecily. [Coming over very slowly.] But I don't like German. It isn't at all a becoming language. I know perfectly well that I look quite plain after my German lesson. Miss Prism. Child, you know how anxious your guardian is that you should improve yourself in every way. He laid particular stress on your German when he is leaving for town. Cecily. Dear Uncle Jack is so very serious! Sometimes he is so serious that I think he cannot be quite well. Miss Prism. [Drawing herself up.] Your guardian enjoys the best of health, and his gravity of demeanour is especially to be commended in one so comparatively young as he is. I know no one who has a higher sense of duty and responsibility. Cecily. I suppose that is why he often looks a little bored when we three are together. Miss Prism. Cecily! I am surprised at you. Mr. Worthing has many troubles in his life. Idle merriment and triviality would be out of place in his conversation. You must remember his constant anxiety about that unfortunate young man his brother. Cecily. I wish Uncle Jack would allow that unfortunate young man, his brother, to come down here sometimes. We might have a good influence over him, Miss Prism. I am sure you certainly would. You know German, and geology, and things of that kind influence a man very much. [Cecily begins to write in her diary.] Miss Prism. [Shaking her head.] I do not think that even I could produce any effect on a character that according to his own brother's admission is irretrievably weak and vacillating. Indeed I am not sure that I would desire to reclaim him. I am not in favour of this modern mania for turning bad people into good people at a moment's notice. As a man sows so let him reap. You must put away your diary, Cecily. I really don't see why you should keep a diary at all. Cecily. I keep a diary in order to enter the wonderful sec