

The Importance of Being Earnest by Oscar Wilde

Act 1

*Lady Bracknell is interviewing Jack to see whether he is suitable to marry her daughter Gwendolen. She is in the sitting room of her nephew Algernon.*

LADY BRACKNELL:

You can take a seat Mr Worthing. I feel bound to tell you that you are not down on my list of eligible young men, however, I am quite ready to enter your name, should your answers be what a really affectionate mother requires. Do you smoke? 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? 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?

I am pleased to hear it. I do not approve of anything that tampers with natural ignorance. 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?

In land or investments? That is satisfactory. A country house! 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. What number Belgrave Square? The unfashionable side. I thought there was something. However, that could easily be altered. Now to minor matters. Are your parents living?

To lose one parent, Mr Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness. Found! And where did the charitable gentleman find you? A hand-bag? In what locality did this Mr Cardew come across this handbag? The cloakroom in Victoria Station? The line is immaterial, Mr Worthing. To be born, or at any rate bred, in a handbag 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.

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. 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!