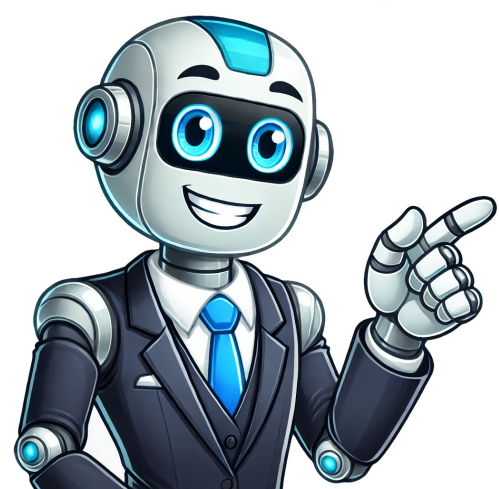


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Project Gutenberg 75,943 free eBooks 69 by Oscar Wilde "The Importance of Being Earnest: A Trivial Comedy for Serious People" by Oscar Wilde is a play written in the late 19th century. This witty farce revolves around the theme of mistaken identities and the absurdities of Victorian society, focusing on the lives of two friends, John Worthing and Algernon Moncrieff, who both assume fictitious personas to escape their societal obligations. The opening of the play establishes Algernon Moncrieff's opulent flat, where ... Read More he converses with his manservant Lane about the complexity of life and marriage. John Worthing, or "Ernest" in town, visits Algernon, expressing his purpose of proposing to Gwendolen Fairfax, Algernon's cousin. Through clever dialogue, the two men discuss their escapades and the concept of "Bunburying," a euphemism for creating a fictional identity to avoid responsibilities. This sets the stage for comedic misunderstandings and romantic entanglements that unfold as they both navigate their relationships with the women in their lives, Gwendolen and Cecily Cardew. [This is an automatically generated summary.] Show Less © 1996-2014, Amazon.com, Inc. or its affiliates edit descriptions of this character Project Gutenberg 75,943 free eBooks 69 by Oscar Wilde The Project Gutenberg eBook of The Importance of Being Earnest, by Oscar Wilde This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of your country where you are located before using this eBook. Title: The Importance of Being Earnest: A Trivial Comedy for Serious People Author: Oscar Wilde Release Date: March 8, 1997 [eBook #4414] [Most recently updated: February 13, 2021] Language: English Character set encoding: UTF-8 Produced by: David Wid Price: *** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST *** John Worthing, J.P. Algernon Moncrieff Rev. Canon Chasuble, D.D. Merriman, Butler Lane, Manservant Lady Bracknell Hon. Gwendolen Fairfax Cecily Cardew Miss Prism, Governor The SCENES OF THE PLAY ACT I. Algernon Moncrieff's Flat in Half-Moon Street, W. ACT II. The Garden at the Manor House, Wootton. ACT III. Drawing-Room at the Manor House, Wootton. 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 Dyrill. 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. 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? I don'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 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 a first-rate brand. ALGERNON. Good heavens! that is a very reasonable supposition. But 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. [Laughs.] I don't know that I'm particularly interested in your family life. Lane. LANE. No, sir; it's not a very interesting subject. I never think of myself ALGERNON. Very natural. I am sure. That will do, Lane, please 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 a 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 let me tell 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 good society, one has to adopt a very high moral tone can hardly be said to conduce in the least to a general improvement in the character of the community. The amount of money which one's husband has to expend in the support of his wife is perfectly scandalous. It is so sad, it is simply washing one's clean linen in public. Besides, now that I know you to be a confirmed flirt, 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? ALGERNON. [To Jack.] 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 Bunburied 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 good society, one has to adopt a very high moral tone can hardly be said to conduce in the least to a general improvement in the character of the community. The amount of money which one's husband has to expend in the support of his wife is perfectly scandalous. It is so sad, it is simply washing one's clean linen in public. Besides, now that I know you to be a confirmed flirt, 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. 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