with the estates. He was the only visitor; the existence of Margaret appeared to be forgotten by the few neighbours. To be sure, Mr. Fenham had quarrelled with most of the families in the neighbourhood, but there were one or two who might have been expected to call on Margaret.

Enid Seymour noted the absence of their cards on the hall table if Margaret did not. The visits of the dried-up, wizened little lawyer were the only break in the monotonous existence. Enid did not like him, but she grew to welcome his appearance before the five weeks of her stay at Fen Court were ended. She had never stayed with Margaret during Mr. Fenham's lifetime, and she had never imagined that such a quiet, solitary existence was led by her.

On the twentieth of July Mr. Cole came with the news that Mr. Geoffrey Fenham would not be in England for another week. Margaret drew a long breath at the week's respite. Enid wished that it was ended; the dulness of Fen Court was oppressive. But she was curious to see the new owner, and her people were staying at a house where she was not liked, so she agreed to remain with Margaret for another week.

On the Saturday after this, Margaret and Miss Seymour were seated on the lawn, under the chestnut trees, drinking their tea. The weather was close and sultry, and the copper sun and heavy clouds threatened a thunderstorm.

The oppressive heat was making Miss Seymour more languid than usual; she was lying back in a long garden chair, her head upon a heliotrope silk cushion to match the shade of her loose flowing dress. Margaret, in a heavy black frock, was seated on the grass, her back against the trunk of a tree, fanning herself vigorously with her sailor hat.

"How cool you look, Enid. I am growing warmer every second."

"Your fanning makes you warm."

"There is not a breath of air. How dreadful it must be in a town on a day like this."

She paused in her fanning and her hat dropped from her fingers. In a week, or perhaps less, she would be pent up in some town—Fen Court would be a memory of the past. The low, rambling house, with its gables and black and white woodwork, the lawn that sloped so gently to the pond (lake, Mr. Cole called it), the chestnuts in the avenue, the water-lilies, the roses that crept over the porch and up to her bedroom window: in a week or a fortnight all this would be left behind. A lump rose in her throat.

A man was passing the front of the house; he looked up at the windows, then turned with hands in his pockets, and looked across the lawn at the two girls.

"Who is that man?" asked Enid.

"Some tramp begging. He has come to the front of the house by mistake."

"The tramp" was crossing the lawn towards them.

"Go round to the kitchen," said Margaret, in her clear, imperious young voice; "they will give you some bread and cheese, but I never give money to beggars."

A droll smile twisted the man's features.

"That's a pity," he said.

Enid roused herself at the tone of voice, and Margaret flushed and looked at the "beggar." His clean-shaven face, and tall, lithe figure reminded her of someone. Who was it? Who could it be?

Mr. Cole came hurrying from the house, his thin legs working their fastest.

Margaret rose to her feet; she knew what was coming.

"Margaret takes me for a beggar," said the man over his shoulder to the little lawyer.

"This is Mr. Geoffrey Fenham," said Mr. Cole, panting from his exertions.

END OF CHAPTER THE THIRD.

A TALK WITH MR. JEROME K. JEROME.

BY RAYMOND BLATHWAYT.

A VERY quiet, retiring man of some thirty-odd years, Mr. Jerome is, nevertheless, possessed of a quietly humorous way of putting before his listener the most ordinary incidents of human life. He is, therefore, a very delightful companion, and a many-sided one also.

For no less remarkable than is his fund of genuine humour is his great earnestness of manner, his evident thoughtfulness, and the curiously wide range of his reading. He is not in the least the flashy, cheaply-clever, shallow and superficial person that some have imagined him to be. On the contrary, a quite remarkable serious-mindedness is constantly displaying itself in his conversation, and frequently in his work, which has many touches here and there of a very genuine pathos and a very dainty thoughtfulness. You can read this in the face of the man: a very kind face, conveying a wonderful amount of tender-heartedness and gentle consideration for others: nothing weak about it though.

Weakness and tender-heartedness go so nearly together that by the superficial observer they are frequently not to be separated. But in the rather youthful face of Mr. Jerome one can trace plenty of strength, some amount of patient perseverance, which, indeed, is one of his chief characteristics. We sat together one long summer morning—he and I—in the verandah which runs round the pretty little house in St. John's

Wood in which he lives, and all these characteristics I noted as he lay back in his arm-chair, quietly and shrewdly talking to me upon the trend of present-day literature.

After a while I turned the conversation upon his own work in particular, asking him how it was he was able, out of his own inner consciousness as it were, to evolve so many curious specimens of humanity, and yet so true to life.

"Well," he thoughtfully replied, "it is rather difficult to say off-hand, because though I am always studying life in the rough, yet I rarely pick out solitary specimens of humans. Things sink in unconsciously, I suppose. I couldn't tell you what a man had on five minutes after he had left me, but after a while, if I thought about him, he would all come back to me. As to what they say and think—the characters in my books—I always feel as if I knew what a man would say; if I see his face I can always tell what he is going to say, for words, modes of expression, are so much the part of a man.

"Take, for instance, that double character in my 'Novel Notes,' where a man is a gentleman for one month and an East-end blackguard the next month. Whenever I conjured up the two faces of that one man I knew exactly what each would say. Lavater says that you can alter your feelings by your facial muscles.

"'Stick out the jaw,' he says, 'and you feel determined at once.'

"I often do that myself. The muscles have a distinct effect on the will-power. It simply means that body and mind react on one another. Wag a dog's tail to make him good-humoured. If you can make a man laugh against his will, his bad humour goes, dispersed by the muscles of laughter. You notice this often in the House of Commons.

"I always enter into my characters' thoughts and feelings; I can't help myself. Mr. Solomon in painting my portrait the other day noticed that. I happened to think of a murder in my story, the savageness of it came into my face, and he had to paint the expression over again when my thoughts were of a more cheerful nature.

"I don't work from my head, but from my heart. For the time being I am the man I am describing. I could not possibly describe him and his doings in cold blood.

"Take 'Uncle Podger' hanging the pictures in 'Three Men in a Boat.' I actually was that man putting up the pictures, or rather, I was the people standing round him. He was only reflective. I did not take him from his point of view; I was his disgusted wife looking on. I dare say he thought the onlookers a pack of fools.

"My characters really live while I am writing about them. *Now* they are like people gone abroad—they have dropped out of my life. It is not till I have got two-thirds through my book that I know my new characters.

"Many authors go back to their old characters. Bret Harte must have loved to go back to Bill."

"And what class of people do you best like to describe?"

"There again it is difficult to say definitely," replied my host, as he lit one of his never-failing cigarettes. "There is a keen study underneath the surface to be found in the quieter and better-educated classes; bizarre effects in the eccentric strong characters; but it is the totally uncultivated who provide the strongest. My great point, I think, is in making people talk; but I don't think you can train yourself to it. If you have a strong sympathy generally you can at once get *inside* a man.

MR. JEROME K. JEROME.
(*From a photograph by Messrs. Barrauds, Ltd., Oxford Street, W.*)

"You think with him and express yourself with him. Each class has certain subtleties. The costermonger, the politician, the society *flâneur*; imagine them gathered round one subject, and how differently each of them would view the same thing, each one from his own point of thought.

"There would be little turns of wording and expression—the reflex of the man's thought, and this, without taking into account accent or grammatical accuracy—merely the bent of mind."

"How do you explain to yourself your own motives, Mr. Jerome?" I asked, as we rose from our seats to take a turn round the pretty little garden.

"I don't do so at all. Where you can explain your motives and analyse your work you are sure to be weakest. The strongest work is always the most unconscious."

"Well, now," I interrupted, anxious to get at the genesis, so to speak, of so thoughtful a writer, "what has formed your mind: reading, study, or experience of life and men?"

"I have read very little," he replied, to my very considerable astonishment, for his conversation quite naturally and unconsciously had implied the very reverse. "I am not a reader—I have never been fond of it since boyhood. The only reading I really care for is history, so that my knowledge, whatever it is, is simply the experience of life. There is more interest in life than in anything else.

"To be always about and thinking—that is the main point, though I own that one is obliged to read nowadays to be able to hold one's own at a dinner-table. I like anything that gives one facts, as I suppose history does. It is, however, very interesting to me to read people's motives—you get so good an insight into actual character. I like to think of Robespierre joining in the village politics, and then to think of him as he was in power, tracing back the germ of the savage nature in the man.

"But as a whole, my taste for reading passed away when I ceased to be a boy and began to think."

"And now tell me," said I, "something about your best known book, 'Three Men in a Boat.'"

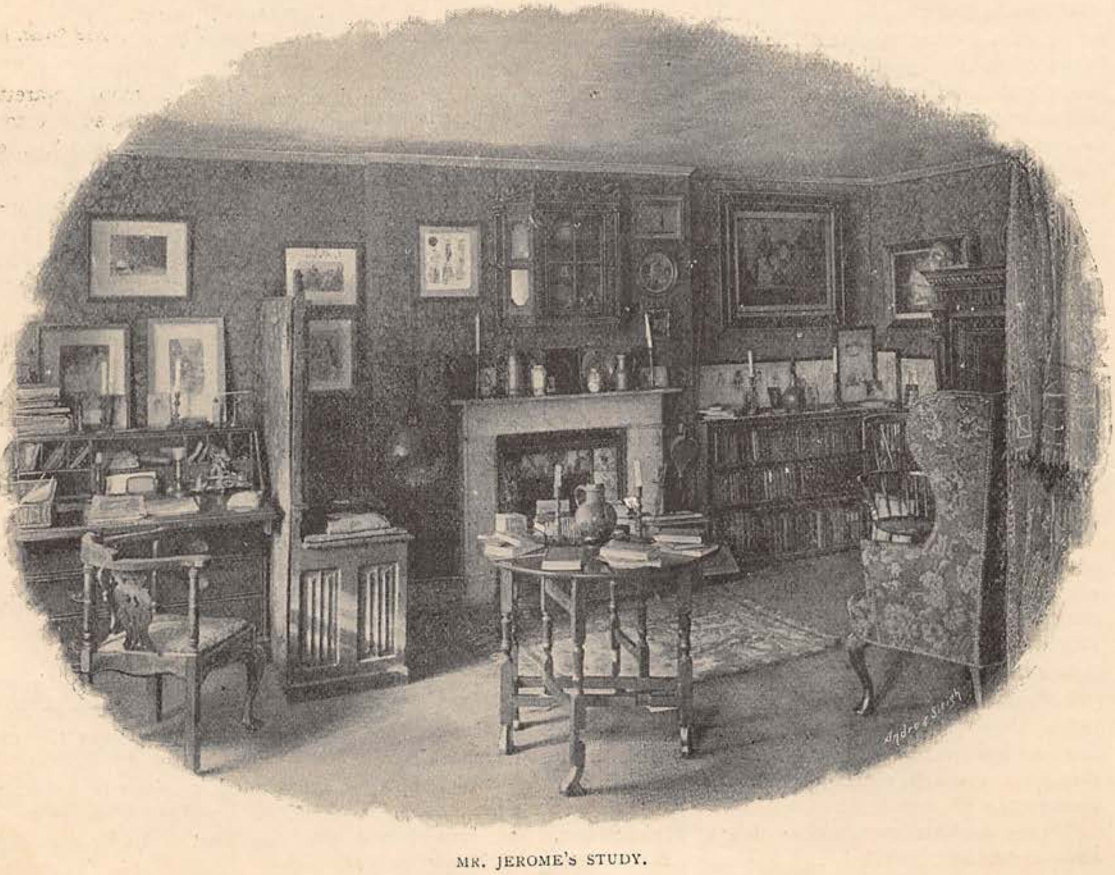
"Well," he humorously replied, "I didn't write it of *malice prepense*—I liked the work. It cleared away my boyishness, it was the outcome of sheer animal spirits. I did not sit down to it in cold blood, regarding it as a mere literary effort.

"Dickens could never have turned out 'Pickwick' in mature age. You know, I don't think the best works are always literary. I was dreadfully pitched into by the critics for 'Three Men'—vulgar, slangy, inane, illiterate—I don't know what they didn't call it and me.

"But, after all, it is a piece of realism, and not very unclean realism either. What I say is this: if you write a book dealing with the present day, write facts. Convention is not fact. I grant you 'Three Men' is calculated to irritate the superior article. I have taken it up myself in one mood, and flung it aside in disgust.

"Now, look here," continued my host, as he deftly rolled me up a cigarette, "people don't seem to realise that a man is a being of many moods. Can't your superior critic see that I like the serious side of humanity quite as well as the mere frivolous side? Can't he understand that almost invariably humour and pathos go together? The serious public don't seem to think a thing is serious unless it is put in a serious manner.

"The modern serious public would never take Voltaire as serious on account of his style. But he is every bit as serious as Carlyle. If I want to say anything serious, it is easier for me to say it in the form of a farcical tale than to put it forward in an essay with big-sounding words.



MR. JEROME'S STUDY.

"It is so difficult to get the public to see a serious thing under a light way of putting it. If Æsop came and wrote to-day, only the editors of children's magazines would notice his fables. Some of Josh Billings's sayings are as serious as Thomas Hardy's, but yet everyone looks on Josh Billings as an American *drôle*.

"Humour is often very deep seriousness run to bitterness. A man often attempts to laugh and joke over a thing he feels is too deep and painful to discuss in any other way. There are thoughts, you know, that lie too deep for tears; but can you not express them with a laugh, however paradoxical it may sound?

"Humour is not so much a peculiar way of looking at life as of expressing what one sees and knows of life. Humorists see as clearly as anyone, and perhaps more clearly than most, the serious side of human life."

"But do English people really appreciate humour?" I asked.

"Well, that depends, of course, on the kind of humour and the kind of people. Humour is natural, and we are meant to laugh; of that I am certain, but humour is not of the intellect, and it *cannot* be forced, as seriousness can; it must be spontaneous. I think this, you know: that culture does away with the humorous faculty.

"The lower orders all have humour. The third-class carriage always provides it. The Oxford don may give you a cynical observation now and again, but he rarely jokes. The cultured man is irritated by humour, though perhaps he gives way now and again after dinner, when the animal is apt to predominate over the intellectual."

I happened to remark upon the number of *young* men who are rising in the literary firmament, laying special stress upon their youth and the agreeable freshness of their outlook upon life.

"Yes," said Mr. Jerome, "you lose in after life what you can never regain—the freshness of opinion. At first it is all so new to one that one delightedly puts down on paper thoughts and feelings that never come in after life.

"May I instance my own 'Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow'? They contain the views of a very young man on the world in general. All the critics could do was to shrug their shoulders and say it had all been done before. Precisely, I don't deny it, but I felt it was interesting just because it came fresh from one's self—myself, yourself, or anybody else—it doesn't matter.

"A fool's opinion is often more interesting than a wise man's comments on someone else's views. I always like to get a 'bus driver's opinions, for instance. Not that I mean for a moment to imply that they are fools—the very reverse; but because it is *their* opinion, pure and undiluted, not somebody else's watered down. Your man of wisdom merely echoes his memories of what forty different people have said or written. And then it is for this very reason that a young man's views of life are more interesting than an older man's.

"I believe we often lose intelligence as we grow older. As young men we are fresh and original: as middle-aged men we are the mere echoes of what we have heard or read."

We fell into a discussion as to the various kinds of reading public.

"Ah," said my host, "how curiously varied it is nowadays. You find intelligent appreciation of the best very often where you least expect it. Take, for instance, our artisan class. You have no idea how really clever and artistic these men sometimes are. We have been doing up our house lately, and the other morning I had a talk with some of the men, and to my astonishment I found they read and appreciated Kipling, Hardy, Barrie, and others. They had joined free libraries, and so they were able to get these writers, and were well up in them.

"They don't all appreciate things specially written for them, I can tell you. I assure you they don't regard it as a compliment by any means. What a writer in the present day has to contend against is the dense stupidity of our small provincial classes."

"You were very daring in starting with so high-class a magazine as that," I observed, as I caught sight of a copy of *The Idler* lying on the window-sill.

Mr. Jerome laughed quietly as he replied—

"We determined we would begin at the top and not at the bottom. Indeed, there was no room except at the top. There's always room at the top—room for the best. I don't believe nowadays in beginning at the bottom rung of the ladder. It is the big scheme now that wins. One must put it to the touch to *win* or *lose* it all. It only wants pluck."

At this moment the clever young wife of the author joined us, catching up at the moment his last words—"It only wants pluck."

"Ah!" she laughingly said, "my husband doesn't want for pluck, does he?"

"Well," he very modestly observed, "I have required it, I can assure you, in my career through life. I had a pretty rough time of it at the outset. I began life in an office, then I quitted that for the work of a shorthand writer, a mere reporter, going to political, social, scientific meetings, and if I saw no one else there I would take notes, write them on a 'flimsy,' and take them round to different offices.

"A wretched life then, but splendid training. My method of work now is very uncertain. I am always at work, as I told you, studying character chiefly, and different types of life—sometimes as a shorthand writer in the streets, sometimes in the study in a frenzy of thought.

"I write just as I can, generally of a morning. My work is only of myself, and can only be done when I am in the humour.

"Trollope once told a young fellow who asked him what he should strive to acquire most if he settled down to the career of a writer—a bit of cobbler's wax.

"But that may have suited him, to be glued to his seat and to turn out so many pages per day. The less fortunate must wait for the inspiration."