



WILLIAM WYMARK JACOBS—who is so well known to readers of this Magazine, in which his stories exclusively appear—was born in London on the 8th September, 1863. His father was manager of a wharf at Wapping, so that while yet a boy he became thoroughly familiar with river life, and doubtless met many of the old salts whom he subsequently depicted in his stories with such inimitable humour.

Like many other writers he began his career in the Civil Service, where he was clerk in the Savings Bank Department from 1883 till 1899, and it was here, when he was in his twenty-second year, that his maiden effort in literature appeared in a Post Office journal known as the *Blackfriars Magazine*. He confesses himself that this early work was largely modelled on Max Adeler's "Out of the Hurly-Burly," so much so, indeed, that his editor, while encouraging him to go on writing, suggested that original matter was far more likely to succeed than anything copied.

Mr. Jacobs very sensibly took the editor's advice, and before long articles from his pen began to find acceptance in one or two popular journals and small periodicals. The turning-point in his career, however, came when he sent in a story entitled "A Case of Desertion" to Mr. J. K. Jerome, at that time editor of *To-Day*. No doubt humour leapt out to meet humour, for not only was the story accepted, but the writer was asked to supply others in the same vein, and in this way the series of stories known as "Many Cargoes" came to be written, and at once placed Mr. Jacobs in the foremost ranks of modern humorists. In view of the enormous success of the book, which within three years of publication ran into eighteen editions, it was curious to note that it was refused by no fewer than four publishers. His other works, "The Skipper's Wooing," "Sea

Urchins," "A Master of Craft," "Light Freights," "At Sunwich Port," are almost too well known to need comment. "The Lady of the Barge" is better known in the dramatic garb—in the fashioning of which he had the collaboration of Mr. Louis N. Parker—in which it delighted the audiences of the New and Haymarket Theatres for so long. Mr. Jacobs is also joint author of the two curtain-raisers, "The Ghost of Jerry Bundler" and "The Monkey's Paw."

As to his methods of labour, he has been questioned by more than one interviewer on the subject. In the matter of plot, he considers a man and a girl about the best base to work from, as being certain to lead somewhere. Sometimes, however, he begins a story with the mere conception of a character. Round this he groups a series of people and incidents likely to bring out its most salient points, and so a plot springs up without his quite knowing how.

He is no believer in burning the midnight oil, and does most of his work before dinner. He takes, on an average, about a month over a story, though "False Colours" was written in one day. That, however, was exceptional. It is interesting to note, in reference to this



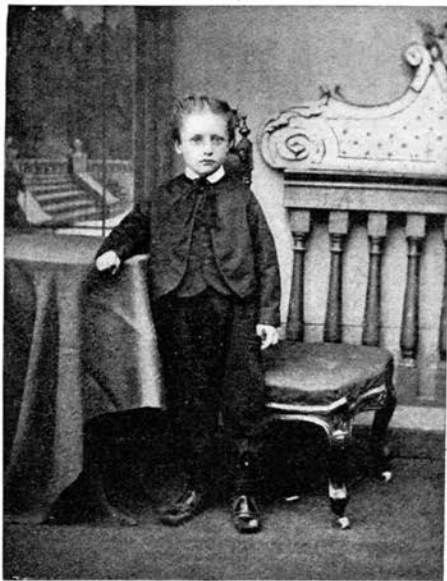
AGE 3.

From a Photo. by Barnes & Son.

story, that though many of the characters he depicts are actual sketches of people he met in Wapping, or on some of the trips he took in little coasting vessels, "False Colours" is the only yarn he ever heard from a seaman that he was able to work up into a story.

Questioned once on the subject of humour, Mr. Jacobs refused to commit himself to a definition, but gave what he considered an example of true humour, devoid of brutality. "A little girl in her prayers at night asked to be made pure—absolutely pure—pure like Epps's Cocoa!"

Like Dickens, all of whose books he had read before he was in his teens, Mr. Jacobs attaches a good deal of importance to names,



AGE 7.
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AGE 11.
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and the curious examples to be found in his stories have often been the subject of remark. Unlike Dickens, however, who manufactured most of his names, Mr. Jacobs simply keeps a list of all the odd real names he comes across, and refers to it when in search of one. On one occasion he received a letter from a correspondent in Somersetshire, whose surname he had used for one of his characters, and who asked him where he had heard it, as she had never come across it outside her own village. It so happened that he had seen it in the records of the Savings Bank Department in his Civil Service days.

As to the question of heredity in the matter of literary and seafaring tastes, it has already been stated that Mr. Jacobs's father was a wharfinger at

Wapping, and he also had a great-grandfather a seaman, and a great-aunt with a talent for poetry. As a boy he himself had a great longing to be a sailor, but gave up all such ideas after his first cruise, when he was extremely ill.

Mr. Jacobs's personal appearance has, perhaps, been more frequently described than that of any living writer. It seems a matter of perpetual surprise to many people that he is neither bronzed nor burly, nor even breezy. His slightness of build, combined with extreme fairness of complexion, gives him an almost boyish appearance, and no amount of success or popularity has ever made him other than the quietest and most unassuming of men. Assuredly he is of those whom prosperity does not spoil.



AGE 25.
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W. W. JACOBS—PRESENT DAY.

From a Photo. by Arthur Hands, Studios, Wanstead.