

## Miss Prism, Chasuble, Jack

**Miss Prism.** You are too much alone, dear Dr. Chasuble. You should get married. A misanthrope I can understand—a womanthrope, never!

**Chasuble.** [*With a scholar's shudder.*] Believe me, I do not deserve so neologistic a phrase. The precept as well as the practice of the Primitive Church was distinctly against matrimony.

**Miss Prism.** [*Sententiously.*] That is obviously the reason why the Primitive Church has not lasted up to the present day. And you do not seem to realize, dear Doctor, that by persistently remaining single, a man converts himself into a permanent public temptation. Men should be more careful; this very celibacy leads weaker vessels astray.

**Chasuble.** But is a man not equally attractive when married?

**Miss Prism.** No married man is ever attractive except to his wife.

**Chasuble.** And often, I've been told, not even to her.

**Miss Prism.** That depends on the intellectual sympathies of the woman. Maturity can always be depended on. Ripeness can be trusted. Young women are green. [*Dr. Chasuble starts.*] I spoke horticulturally. My metaphor was drawn from fruits. But where is Cecily?

**Chasuble.** Perhaps she followed us to the schools.

*[Enter Jack slowly from the back of the garden. He is dressed in the deepest mourning, with crape hatband and black gloves.]*

**Miss Prism.** Mr. Worthing!

**Chasuble.** Mr. Worthing?

**Miss Prism.** This is indeed a surprise. We did not look for you till Monday afternoon.

**Jack.** [*Shakes Miss Prism's hand in a tragic manner.*] I have returned sooner than I expected. Dr. Chasuble, I hope you are well?

**Chasuble.** Dear Mr. Worthing, I trust this garb of woe does not betoken some terrible calamity?

**Jack.** My brother.

**Miss Prism.** More shameful debts and extravagance?

**Chasuble.** Still leading his life of pleasure?

**Jack.** [*Shaking his head.*] Dead!

**Chasuble.** Your brother Ernest dead?

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**Jack.** Quite dead.

**Miss Prism.** What a lesson for him! I trust he will profit by it.

**Chasuble.** Mr. Worthing, I offer you my sincere condolence. You have at least the consolation of knowing that you were always the most generous and forgiving of brothers.

**Jack.** Poor Ernest! He had many faults, but it is a sad, sad blow.

**Chasuble.** Very sad indeed. Were you with him at the end?

**Jack.** No. He died abroad; in Paris, in fact. I had a telegram last night from the manager of the Grand Hotel.

**Chasuble.** Was the cause of death mentioned?

**Jack.** A severe chill, it seems.

**Miss Prism.** As a man sows, so shall he reap.

**Chasuble.** [*Raising his hand.*] Charity, dear Miss Prism, charity! None of us are perfect. I myself am peculiarly susceptible to draughts. Will the interment take place here?

**Jack.** No. He seems to have expressed a desire to be buried in Paris.

**Chasuble.** In Paris! [*Shakes his head.*] I fear that hardly points to any very serious state of mind at the last. You would no doubt wish me to make some slight allusion to this tragic domestic affliction next Sunday. [*Jack presses his hand convulsively.*] My sermon on the meaning of the manna in the wilderness can be adapted to almost any occasion, joyful, or, as in the present case, distressing. [*All sigh.*] I have preached it at harvest celebrations, christenings, confirmations, on days of humiliation and festal days. The last time I delivered it was in the Cathedral, as a charity sermon on behalf of the Society for the Prevention of Discontent among the Upper Orders. The Bishop, who was present, was much struck by some of the analogies I drew.

**Jack.** Ah! that reminds me, you mentioned christenings I think, Dr. Chasuble? I suppose you know how to christen all right? [*Dr. Chasuble looks astounded.*] I mean, of course, you are continually christening, aren't you?

**Miss Prism.** It is, I regret to say, one of the Rector's most constant duties in this parish. I have often spoken to the poorer classes on the subject. But they don't seem to know what thrift is.

**Chasuble.** But is there any particular infant in whom you are interested, Mr. Worthing? Your brother was, I believe, unmarried, was he not?

**Jack.** Oh yes.

**Miss Prism.** [*Bitterly.*] People who live entirely for pleasure usually are.

**Jack.** But it is not for any child, dear Doctor. I am very fond of children. No! The fact is, I would like to be christened myself, this afternoon, if you have nothing better to do.

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**Chasuble.** But surely, Mr. Worthing, you have been christened already?

**Jack.** I don't remember anything about it.

**Chasuble.** But have you any grave doubts on the subject?

**Jack.** I certainly intend to have. Of course I don't know if the thing would bother you in any way, or if you think I am a little too old now.

**Chasuble.** Not at all. The sprinkling, and, indeed, the immersion of adults is a perfectly canonical practice.

**Jack.** Immersion!

**Chasuble.** You need have no apprehensions. Sprinkling is all that is necessary, or indeed I think advisable. Our weather is so changeable. At what hour would you wish the ceremony performed?

**Jack.** Oh, I might trot round about five if that would suit you.

**Chasuble.** Perfectly, perfectly! In fact I have two similar ceremonies to perform at that time. A case of twins that occurred recently in one of the outlying cottages on your own estate. Poor Jenkins the carter, a most hard-working man.

**Jack.** Oh! I don't see much fun in being christened along with other babies. It would be childish. Would half-past five do?

**Chasuble.** Admirably! Admirably! [*Takes out watch.*] And now, dear Mr. Worthing, I will not intrude any longer into a house of sorrow. I would merely beg you not to be too much bowed down by grief. What seem to us bitter trials are often blessings in disguise.

**Miss Prism.** This seems to me a blessing of an extremely obvious kind.