

**THACKERAY'S LIGHTER  
HOURS: BEING  
SELECTIONS FROM  
THE MINOR WRITINGS**

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Thackeray's Lighter Hours: Being Selections from the Minor Writings by William Makepeace Thackeray

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**WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY**

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Modern Classics

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THACKERAY'S LIGHTER  
HOURS

BEING SELECTIONS FROM THE  
MINOR WRITINGS

OF

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY



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## DOCTOR BIRCH AND HIS YOUNG FRIENDS.

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### THE DOCTOR AND HIS STAFF.

**T**HERE is no need to say why I became assistant-master and professor of the English and French languages, flower-painting, and the German flute, in Dr. Birch's Academy, at Rodwell Regis. Good folks may depend on this, that it was not for *choice* that I left lodgings near London, and a genteel society, for an under-master's desk in that old school. I promise you the fare at the usher's table, the getting up at five o'clock in the morning, the walking out with little boys in the fields (who used to play me tricks, and never could be got to respect my awful and responsible character as teacher in the school), Miss Birch's vulgar insolence, Jack Birch's glum condescension, and the poor old Doctor's patronage, were not matters in themselves pleasurable: and that that patronage and those dinners were

sometimes cruel hard to swallow. Never mind — my connection with the place is over now, and I hope they have got a more efficient under-master.

Jack Birch (Rev. J. Birch, of St. Neot's Hall, Oxford) is partner with his father the Doctor, and takes some of the classes. About his Greek I can't say much ; but I will construe him in Latin any day. A more supercilious little prig (giving himself airs, too, about his cousin, Miss Raby, who lives with the Doctor), a more empty, pompous little coxcomb I never saw. His white neck-cloth looked as if it choked him. He used to try and look over that starch upon me and Prince the assistant, as if we were a couple of footmen. He did n't do much business in the school ; but occupied his time in writing sanctified letters to the boys' parents, and in composing dreary sermons to preach to them.

The real master of the school is Prince ; an Oxford man too ; shy, haughty, and learned ; crammed with Greek and a quantity of useless learning ; uncommonly kind to the small boys ; pitiless with the fools and the braggarts ; respected of all for his honesty, his learning, his bravery (for he hit out once in a boat-row in a way which astonished the boys and the large-

men), and for a latent power about him, which all saw and confessed somehow. Jack Birch could never look him in the face. Old Miss Z. dared not put off any of *her* airs upon him. Miss Rosa made him the lowest of courtesies. Miss Raby said she was afraid of him. Good old Prince! we have sat many a night smoking in the Doctor's harness-room, whither we retired when our boys were gone to bed, and our canes and canes put by.

After Jack Birch had taken his degree at Oxford — a process which he effected with great difficulty — this place, which used to be called "Birch's," "Dr. Birch's Academy," and what not, became suddenly "Archbishop Wigsby's College of Rodwell Regis." They took down the old blue board with the gold letters, which has been used to mend the pigsty since. Birch had a large school-room run up in the Gothic taste, with statuettes, and a little belfry, and a bust of Archbishop Wigsby in the middle of the school. He put the six senior boys into caps and gowns, which had rather a good effect as the lads sauntered down the street of the town, but which certainly provoked the contempt and hostility of the bargemen; and so great was his rage for academic costumes and ordinances, that he would have put me myself