

**PAYING GUESTS,  
A NOVEL**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649668625

Paying Guests, a Novel by E. F. Benson

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**E. F. BENSON**

**PAYING GUESTS,  
A NOVEL**



PAYING GUESTS

*Novels by E. F. Benson*

DODO  
DODO WONDERS  
COLIN  
COLIN II  
LUCIA IN LONDON  
ROBIN LINNET  
QUEEN LUCIA  
MISS MAPP  
PHARISEES AND PUBLICANS  
VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE

YF  
BATSAPAY

# PAYING GUESTS

A Novel by

E. F. BENSON

*"Author of Dodo."*

THIRD IMPRESSION

501825

27 12.49

HUTCHINSON & CO. (Publishers), LTD.  
PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON, E.C.4

# Paying Guests

## CHAPTER I

DOLTON SPA, justly famous for the infamous savour of the waters which so magically get rid of painful deposits in the joints and muscles of the lame and the halt, and for the remedial rasp of its saline baths in which the same patients are pickled daily to their great relief, had been crammed all the summer, and the proprietors of its hotels and boarding houses had been proving that for them at least rheumatism and its kindred afflictions had a silver if not a golden lining. Never had Wentworth and Balmoral and Blenheim and Belvoir entertained so continuous a complement of paying guests, and even now, though the year had wheeled into mid-October, and the full season was long past, Mrs. Oxney was still booking rooms for fresh arrivals at Wentworth during the next two months. In fact she did not know when she would get off on her holiday, and as long as this prosperous tide continued to flow, she cared very little whether she got off at all. Though she did not want money, she liked it, and though she liked a holiday, she did not want it.

The existence, or rather the names, of Balmoral, Blenheim and Belvoir was a slight but standing grievance with Mrs. Oxney, the sort of grievance which occasionally kept her awake for half an hour should it perch in her drowsy consciousness as she composed



herself to sleep and begin pecking at her mind. 'For naturally,' so she thought to herself in these infrequent vigils, 'if a lady or gentleman was thinking of coming to Bolton Spa, and wanted comfort and, I may say, luxury when they are taking their cure, they would look at the Baths Guide-book, and imagine that Balmoral and Blenheim and Belvoir and Wentworth were all much of a muchness. And then if they chose any of the others they would find themselves in a wretched little gimcrack semi-detached villa down in the hollow, with only one bathroom and that charged extra, and the enamel all off, and cold supper on Sunday and nobody dressing for dinner. Not that it's illegal to call yourself Balmoral, far from it; for there is nothing to prevent you calling your house "Boiled Rabbit" or "Castor Oil," but those who haven't got big houses ought to have enough proper feeling not to mis-call them by big names.'

Mrs. Oxney's grievance was as well founded as most little vexations of the kind, for certainly Wentworth was a very different class of house from Balmoral and Blenheim and Belvoir, which, though it might possibly be libellous to call them gimcrack, could not be described as other than semi-detached. There could not be any divergence of opinion over that point or over the singleness of their bathrooms and the cold supper on Sunday. Wentworth, on the other hand, was so entirely and magnificently detached that nobody would dream of calling it detached at all: you might as well call a ship at sea detached. The nearest house to it was at least a hundred yards away, and on all sides but one more like a quarter of a mile, and the whole of that territory was 'grounds.' It had gardens (kitchen and flower) it had tennis courts (hard and soft) a croquet-lawn (hard or soft according to the state of the weather) and a large field in which Colonel Chase had induced Mrs. Oxney to make five widely

sundered putting-greens, one in each corner and one in the middle, like the five of diamonds. The variety of holes therefore was immense, for you could play from any one hole to any other hole, and thus make a round of twenty holes, a total unrivalled by any championship course, which, so the Colonel told Mrs. Oxney, had never more than eighteen. As for bathrooms, Wentworth already had twice as many as any of the semi-detached villas with those magnificent but deceptive names, and Mrs. Oxney was intending to put in a third, while in contrast with their paltry cold supper on Sunday, the guests at Wentworth enjoyed on that day a dinner of peculiar profusion and delicacy, for there was a savoury as well as a sweet, and dessert. All these points of superiority made it a bitter thought that visitors could be so ill-informed as to class Wentworth with establishments of similar title.

But throughout this summer Mrs. Oxney had seldom brooded over this possible misconception, for, as she was saying to her sister as they sat out under the cedar by the croquet-lawn, she asked nothing more than to have Wentworth permanently full. She was a tall grey-haired woman, who, as a girl, with a mop of black hair, a quick beady eye, and a long nose had been remarkably like a crow. But now the black hair had turned a most becoming grey, the beady eye was alive with kindness, and the long nose was rendered less beak-like by the filling out of her face. From her mouth, when she talked to her guests came a perennial stream of tactful observations, and she presented to the world a very comely and amiable appearance. Her sister, Amy Bertram, who, like herself, was a widow, and ran the house in rather subordinate partnership with her, was still crow-like, but, unlike Mrs. Oxney, had a remarkable capacity for seeing the dark side of every situation, and for suitably croaking over it.

She shook her head over Margaret's contented retrospect.

"Things may not be so bad just for the moment," she said, "and as most of the rooms are engaged up till Christmas, we may get through this year all right. But we must be prepared to be very empty from then onwards, for a good season like this is always followed by a very empty one. How we shall manage to get through the spring is more than I can tell you: don't ask me. And I do hope, Margaret, that you'll think twice before putting in that extra bathroom. It will be a great expense, and you must reckon on spending double the estimate."

"Nonsense, my dear," said Margaret. "They've contracted for a fixed sum—and high enough too—for doing everything down to a hot towel-rail, and they've got to carry it out."

Amy shook her head again.

"Then you'll find, if you keep them to the contract there'll be bad workmanship somewhere. I know what plumbers are. The taps will leak, and the towel-rail be cold. Besides I can't think what you want with a third bathroom. It seems to me that it's just to humour Colonel Chase who would like one nearer his bedroom. I'm sure the other bathrooms are hardly used at all as it is. Most of our guests don't want a bath if after breakfast they are going to soak for a quarter of an hour down at the establishment. I shouldn't dream of putting another in. And Miss Howard is sure to make a fuss if there's hammering and workmen going on all day and night next her room."

Mrs. Oxney felt this point was worth considering, for though it was worth while to please Colonel Chase, it was certainly not worth while to displease Miss Howard. These two were not guests who came for a three weeks' cure and were gone again, but practically permanent inmates of Wentworth, who had lived here