Mr. Midshipman Easy

by Captain Marryat.

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Editor's Note

PRE-EMINENT among the kindly, good-humoured portraits that hang in Marryat's long gallery of fun stands "equality Jack," Mr Midshipman Easy. The critical reader to-day, quoting the science of heredity as taught in continental fiction, may smile at the absurd production of so shrewd a youth from such thoroughly imbecile parents. But the comment is irrational and pedantic. To appreciate a farce we must grant to the author his "impossible" conditions; and may *then* demand that he should manipulate them effectively.

Given the mad father, the doting mother, etc., and his own clever, manly, and affectionate nature, Jack's conduct in the middies' berth is no libel on humanity. It possesses the further merit of being extremely amusing. He argues with so much point and persistence, and accepts the consequences of differing from his superior officers with so much genuine philosophy, that the reader scarcely knows whether to laugh at or with him. Certainly Jack is no fool, and as experience develops his character we find ourselves, without fear of inconsistency, slowly changing our point of view and confessing to a certain measure of cordial respect for the lad we were once nearly tempted to despise.

In a story depending for its main interest on comedy that is almost wholly farcical, it is peculiarly satisfactory to find men of sterling worth untouched by satire, and the serious side of life treated with feeling. Captain Wilson and his worthy lieutenant, Sawbridge, do not suffer in dignity from their wit-conflicts with the hero who, indeed, is never essentially disrespectful to his seniors. The slight sketch of Martin, the melancholy mate, has been justly praised for its genuine, quiet pathos; and Jack's treatment of his poor father is thoughtful and considerate.

It is scarcely necessary to speak of the admirable and stirring scenes of naval life with which the pages of this novel are crowded. Obviously Jack's experiences are over-crowded and impossibly varied, but any one of them is within the range of a midshipman's

actual daily life. The encounter with the Russian frigate is considered a masterly report of a perfectly actual sea-fight.

There is a striking passage in Henry Kingsley's *Ravenshoe* which shows that he, at any rate, gave much honour to Midshipman Easy. While sailing past Malta at sunrise, "a flood of historical recollections comes over Charles, and he recognises the place as one long known and very dear to him. On these very stairs Mr Midshipman Easy stood, and resolved that he would take a boat and sail to Gazo. What followed on his resolution is a matter of history. Other events have taken place at Malta, of which Charles was as well informed as the majority, but Charles did not think of them; not even of St Paul and the viper, or the old wordy dispute in Greek testament lecture at Oxford between this Melita and the other one off the coast of Illyricum. He thought of Midshipman Easy, and felt as if he had seen the place before."

When this novel, for which he received £1200, was first published, Marryat was editing the *Metropolitan Magazine*, and he printed a specimen chapter, the first, in the number for August 1836, by way of advertisement.

Midshipman Easy is here re-printed, with a few corrections, from the first edition in three vols. Saunders & Otley, 1836.

R. B. J.

MARRYAT, 1792-1848

Suggestions for the Abolition of the Present System of Impressment in the Naval Service, 1822; The Naval Officer, or Scenes and Adventures in the Life of Frank Mildmay, 1829; The King's Own, 1830; Newton Forster (from the *Metropolitan Magazine*), 1832; Jacob Faithful (from the *Metropolitan Magazine*), 1834; Peter Simple, 1834; The Pacha of Many Tales, 1835; Midshipman Easy (from the *Metropolitan Magazine*), 1836; Japhet in Search of a Father (from the *Metropolitan Magazine*), 1836; The Pirate and The Three Cutters, 1836; A Code of Signals for the Use of Vessels employed in the Merchant Service, 1837; Snarleyyow, or The Dog Fiend, 1837; A Diary in America, with Remarks on its Institutions, 1839; The Phantom Ship, 1839; Poor Jack, 1840; Olla Podrida (articles from the *Metropolitan Magazine*), 1840; Joseph Rushbrook, or The Poacher, 1841; Masterman Ready, or The Wreck of the *Pacific*, 1841; Percival Keene, 1842; Narrative of the Travels and Adventures of Monsieur Violet in California, Sonora, and Western Texas, 1843; The Settlers in Canada, 1844; The Mission, or Scenes in Africa, 1845; The Privateer's Man, 1846; The Children of the New Forest, 1847; The Little Savage (posthumous), 1848-49; Valerie (posthumous), 1849; Life and Letters, Florence Marryat, 1872

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Mr Midshipman Easy

Chapter I

Which the reader will find very easy to read.

Mr Nicodemus Easy was a gentleman who lived down in Hampshire; he was a married man, and in very easy circumstances. Most couples find it very easy to have a family, but not always quite so easy to maintain them. Mr Easy was not at all uneasy on the latter score, as he had no children; but he was anxious to have them, as most people covet what they cannot obtain. After ten years, Mr Easy gave it up as a bad job. Philosophy is said to console a man under disappointment, although Shakespeare asserts that it is no remedy for toothache; so Mr Easy turned philosopher, the very best profession a man can take up, when he is fit for nothing else; he must be a very incapable person indeed who cannot talk nonsense. For some time, Mr Easy could not decide upon what description his nonsense should consist of; at last he fixed upon the rights of man, equality, and all that; how every person was born to inherit his share of the earth, a right at present only admitted to a certain length; that is, about six feet, for we all inherit our graves, and are allowed to take possession without dispute. But no one would listen to Mr Easy's philosophy. The women would not acknowledge the rights of men, whom they declared always to be in the wrong; and, as the gentlemen who visited Mr Easy were all men of property, they could not

perceive the advantages of sharing with those who had none. However, they allowed him to discuss the question, while they discussed his port wine. The wine was good, if the arguments were not, and we must take things as we find them in this world.

While Mr Easy talked philosophy, Mrs Easy played patience, and they were a very happy couple, riding side by side on their hobbies, and never interfering with each other. Mr Easy knew his wife could not understand him, and therefore did not expect her to listen very attentively; and Mrs Easy did not care how much her husband talked, provided she was not put out in her game. Mutual forbearance will always ensure domestic felicity.

There was another cause for their agreeing so well. Upon any disputed question Mr Easy invariably gave it up to Mrs Easy, telling her that she should have her own way—and this pleased his wife; but, as Mr Easy always took care, when it came to the point, to have his way, he was pleased as well. It is true that Mrs Easy had long found out that she did not have her own way long; but she was of an easy disposition, and as, in nine cases out of ten, it was of very little consequence how things were done, she was quite satisfied with his submission during the heat of the argument. Mr Easy had admitted that she was right, and if like all men he would do wrong, why, what could a poor woman do? With a lady of such a quiet disposition, it is easy to imagine that the domestic felicity of Mr Easy was not easily disturbed. But, as people have observed before, there is a mutability in human affairs. It was at the finale of the eleventh year of their marriage that Mrs Easy at first complained that she could not enjoy her breakfast. Mrs Easy had her own suspicions, everybody else considered it past doubt, all except Mr Easy; he little "thought, good easy man, that his greatness was ripening;" he had decided that to have an heir was no Easy task, and it never came into his calculations, that there could be a change in his wife's figure. You might have added to it, subtracted from it,

divided it, or multiplied it, but as it was a zero, the result would be always the same. Mrs Easy also was not quite sure—she believed it might be the case, there was no saying; it might be a mistake, like that of Mrs Trunnion's in the novel, and, therefore, she said nothing to her husband about the matter. At last Mr Easy opened his eyes, and when, upon interrogating his wife, he found out the astounding truth, he opened his eyes still wider, and then he snapped his fingers and danced, like a bear upon hot plates, with delight, thereby proving that different causes may produce similar effects in two instances at one and the same time. The bear dances from pain, Mr Easy from pleasure; and again, when we are indifferent, or do not care for anything, we snap our fingers at it, and when we are overjoyed, and obtain what we most care for, we also snap our fingers. Two months after Mr Easy snapped his fingers, Mrs Easy felt no inclination to snap hers, either from indifference or pleasure. The fact was, that Mrs Easy's time was come, to undergo what Shakespeare pronounces "the pleasing punishment that women bear;" but Mrs Easy, like the rest of her sex, declared "that all men were liars," and most particularly poets.

But while Mrs Easy was suffering, Mr Easy was in ecstasies. He laughed at pain, as all philosophers do when it is suffered by other people, and not by themselves.

In due course of time, Mrs Easy presented her husband with a fine boy, whom we present to the public as our hero.

Chapter II

In which Mrs Easy, as usual, has her own way.

It was the fourth day after Mrs Easy's confinement that Mr Easy, who was sitting by her bedside in an easy chair, commenced as follows: "I have been thinking, my dear Mrs Easy, about the name I shall give this child."

"Name, Mr Easy! why, what name should you give it but your own?"

"Not so, my dear," replied Mr Easy; "they call all names proper names, but I think that mine is not. It is the very worst name in the calendar."

"Why, what's the matter with it, Mr Easy?"

"The matter affects me as well as the boy. Nicodemus is a long name to write at full length, and Nick is vulgar. Besides, as there will be two Nicks, they will naturally call my boy young Nick, and of course I shall be styled old Nick, which will be diabolical."

"Well, Mr Easy, at all events then let me choose the name."

"That you shall, my dear, and it was with this view that I have mentioned the subject so early."

"I think, Mr Easy, I will call the boy after my poor father—his name shall be Robert."

"Very well, my dear, if you wish it, it shall be Robert. You shall have your own way. But I think, my dear, upon a little consideration, you will acknowledge that there is a decided objection."

"An objection, Mr Easy?"

"Yes, my dear; Robert may be very well, but you must reflect upon the consequences; he is certain to be called Bob."

"Well, my dear, and suppose they do call him Bob?"

"I cannot bear even the supposition, my dear. You forget the county in which we are residing, the downs covered with sheep."

"Why, Mr Easy, what can sheep have to do with a Christian name?"

"There it is; women never look to consequences. My dear, they have a great deal to do with the name of Bob. I will appeal to any farmer in the county, if ninety-nine shepherds' dogs out of one hundred are not called Bob. Now observe, your child is out of doors somewhere in the fields or plantations; you want and you call him. Instead of your child, what do you find? Why, a dozen curs at

least, who come running up to you, all answering to the name of Bob, and wagging their stumps of tails. You see, Mrs Easy, it is a dilemma not to be got over. You level your only son to the brute creation by giving him a Christian name which, from its peculiar brevity, has been monopolised by all the dogs in the county. Any other name you please, my dear, but in this one instance you must allow me to lay my positive veto."

"Well, then, let me see—but I'll think of it, Mr Easy; my head aches very much just now."

"I will think for you, my dear. What do you say to John?"

"O no, Mr Easy, such a common name."

"A proof of its popularity, my dear. It is scriptural—we have the Apostle and the Baptist—we have a dozen Popes who were all Johns. It is royal—we have plenty of kings who were Johns—and moreover, it is short, and sounds honest and manly."

"Yes, very true, my dear; but they will call him Jack."

"Well, we have had several celebrated characters who were Jacks. There was—let me see—Jack the Giant Killer, and Jack of the Bean Stack—and Jack—Jack——"

"Jack Spratt," replied Mrs Easy.

"And Jack Cade, Mrs Easy, the great rebel—and Three-fingered Jack, Mrs Easy, the celebrated negro—and, above all, Jack Falstaff, ma'am, Jack Falstaff—honest Jack Falstaff—witty Jack Falstaff——"

"I thought, Mr Easy, that I was to be permitted to choose the name."

"Well, so you shall, my dear; I give it up to you. Do just as you please; but depend upon it that John is the right name. Is it not now, my dear?"

"It's the way you always treat me, Mr Easy; you say that you give it up, and that I shall have my own way, but I never do have it. I am sure that the child will be christened John."

"Nay, my dear, it shall be just what you please. Now

I recollect it, there were several Greek emperors who were Johns; but decide for yourself, my dear."

"No, no," replied Mrs Easy, who was ill, and unable to contend any longer, "I give it up, Mr Easy. I know how it will be, as it always is: you give me my own way as people give pieces of gold to children, it's their own money, but they must not spend it. Pray call him John."

"There, my dear, did not I tell you you would be of my opinion upon reflection? I knew you would. I have given you your own way, and you tell me to call him John; so now we're both of the same mind, and that point is settled."

"I should like to go to sleep, Mr Easy; I feel far from well."

"You shall always do just as you like, my dear," replied the husband, "and have your own way in everything. It is the greatest pleasure I have when I yield to your wishes. I will walk in the garden. Good-bye, my dear."

Mrs Easy made no reply, and the philosopher quitted the room. As may easily be imagined, on the following day the boy was christened John.

Chapter III

In which our hero has to wait the issue of an argument.

THE reader may observe that, in general, all my first chapters are very short, and increase in length as the work advances. I mention this as a proof of my modesty and diffidence. At first, I am like a young bird just out of its mother's nest, pluming my little feathers and taking short flights. By degrees I obtain more confidence, and wing my course over hill and dale.

It is very difficult to throw any interest into a chapter on childhood. There is the same uniformity in all children until they develop. We cannot, therefore, say much relative to Jack Easy's earliest days; he sucked and threw

up his milk while the nurse blessed it for a pretty dear, slept, and sucked again. He crowed in the morning like a cock, screamed when he was washed, stared at the candle, and made wry faces with the wind. Six months passed in these innocent amusements, and then he was put into shorts. But I ought here to have remarked, that Mrs Easy did not find herself equal to nursing her own infant, and it was necessary to look out for a substitute.

Now a common-place person would have been satisfied with the recommendation of the medical man, who looks but to the one thing needful, which is a sufficient and wholesome supply of nourishment for the child; but Mr Easy was a philosopher, and had latterly taken to craniology, and he descanted very learnedly with the Doctor upon the effect of his only son obtaining his nutriment from an unknown source. "Who knows," observed Mr Easy, "but that my son may not imbibe with his milk the very worst passions of human nature."

"I have examined her," replied the Doctor, "and can safely recommend her."

"That examination is only preliminary to one more important," replied Mr Easy. "I must examine her."

"Examine who, Mr Easy?" exclaimed his wife, who had lain down again on the bed.

"The nurse, my dear."

"Examine what, Mr Easy?" continued the lady.

"Her head, my dear," replied the husband. "I must ascertain what her propensities are."

"I think you had better leave her alone, Mr Easy. She comes this evening, and I shall question her pretty severely. Doctor Middleton, what do you know of this young person?"

"I know, madam, that she is very healthy and strong, or I should not have selected her."

"But is her character good?"

"Really, madam, I know little about her character; but you can make any inquiries you please. But at the same time I ought to observe, that if you are too par-

ticular in that point, you will have some difficulty in providing yourself."

"Well, I shall see," replied Mrs Easy.

"And I shall feel," rejoined the husband.

This parleying was interrupted by the arrival of the very person in question, who was announced by the housemaid, and was ushered in. She was a handsome, florid, healthy-looking girl, awkward and naive in her manner, and apparently not over wise; there was more of the dove than of the serpent in her composition.

Mr Easy, who was very anxious to make his own discoveries, was the first who spoke. "Young woman, come this way, I wish to examine your head."

"Oh! dear me, sir, it's quite clean, I assure you," cried the girl, dropping a curtsey.

Doctor Middleton, who sat between the bed and Mr Easy's chair, rubbed his hands and laughed.

In the meantime, Mr Easy had untied the string and taken off the cap of the young woman, and was very busy putting his fingers through her hair, during which the face of the young woman expressed fear and astonishment.

"I am glad to perceive that you have a large portion of benevolence."

"Yes," replied the young woman, dropping a curtsey.

"And veneration also."

"Thanky, sir."

"And the organ of modesty is strongly developed."

"Yes, sir," replied the girl with a smile.

"That's quite a new organ," thought Dr Middleton.

"Philo-progenitiveness very powerful."

"If you please, sir, I don't know what that is," answered Sarah, with a curtsey.

"Nevertheless you have given us a practical illustration. Mrs Easy, I am satisfied. Have you any questions to ask? But it is quite unnecessary."

"To be sure I have, Mr Easy. Pray, young woman, what is your name?"

"Sarah, if you please, ma'am."

"How long have you been married?"

"Married, ma'am?"

"Yes, married."

"If you please, ma'am, I had a misfortune, ma'am," replied the girl, casting down her eyes.

"What, have you not been married?"

"No, ma'am, not yet."

"Good heavens! Dr Middleton, what can you mean by bringing this person here?" exclaimed Mrs Easy. "Not a married woman, and she has a child!"

"If you please, ma'am," interrupted the young woman, dropping a curtsey, "it was a very little one."

"A very little one!" exclaimed Mrs Easy.

"Yes, ma'am, very small, indeed, and died soon after it was born."

"Oh, Dr Middleton!—what could you mean, Dr Middleton?"

"My dear madam," exclaimed the Doctor, rising from his chair, "this is the only person that I could find suited to the wants of your child, and if you do not take her I cannot answer for its life. It is true, that a married woman might be procured; but married women, who have a proper feeling, will not desert their own children; and as Mr Easy asserts, and you appear to imagine, the temper and disposition of your child may be affected by the nourishment it receives, I think it more likely to be injured by the milk of a married woman who will desert her own child for the sake of gain. The misfortune which has happened to this young woman is not always a proof of a bad heart, but of strong attachment, and the overweening confidence of simplicity."

"You are correct, Doctor," replied Mr Easy, "and her head proves that she is a modest young woman, with strong religious feeling, kindness of disposition, and every other requisite."

"The head may prove it all for what I know, Mr Easy, but her conduct tells another tale."

"She is well fitted for the situation, ma'am," continued the Doctor.

"And if you please, ma'am," rejoined Sarah, "it was *such a little one.*"

"Shall I try the baby, ma'am?" said the monthly nurse, who had listened in silence. "It is fretting so, poor thing, and has its dear little fist right down its throat."

Dr Middleton gave the signal of assent, and in a few seconds Master John Easy was fixed to Sarah as tight as a leech.

"Lord love it, how hungry it is!—there, there, stop it a moment, it's choking, poor thing!"

Mrs Easy, who was lying on her bed, rose up, and went to the child. Her first feeling was that of envy, that another should have such a pleasure which was denied to herself; the next, that of delight, at the satisfaction expressed by the infant. In a few minutes the child fell back in a deep sleep. Mrs Easy was satisfied; maternal feelings conquered all others, and Sarah was duly installed.

To make short work of it, we have said that Jack Easy in six months was in shorts. He soon afterwards began to crawl and show his legs; indeed, so indecorously, that it was evident that he had imbibed no modesty with Sarah's milk, neither did he appear to have gained veneration or benevolence, for he snatched at everything, squeezed the kitten to death, scratched his mother, and pulled his father by the hair; notwithstanding all which, both his father and mother and the whole household declared him to be the finest and sweetest child in the universe. But if we were to narrate all the wonderful events of Jack's childhood from the time of his birth up to the age of seven years, as chronicled by Sarah, who continued his dry nurse after he had been weaned, it would take at least three volumes folio. Jack was brought up in the way that every only child usually is—that is, he was allowed to have his own way.

Chapter IV

In which the Doctor prescribes going to school as a remedy for a cut finger.

"HAVE you no idea of putting the boy to school, Mr Easy?" said Dr Middleton, who had been summoned by a groom with his horse in a foam to attend immediately at Forest Hill, the name of Mr Easy's mansion, and who, upon his arrival, had found that Master Easy had cut his thumb. One would have thought that he had cut his head off by the agitation pervading the whole household—Mr Easy walking up and down very uneasy, Mrs Easy with great difficulty prevented from syncope, and all the maids bustling and passing round Mrs Easy's chair. Everybody appeared excited except Master Jack Easy himself, who, with a rag round his finger, and his pinafore spotted with blood, was playing at bob-cherry, and cared nothing about the matter.

"Well, what's the matter, my little man?" said Dr Middleton, on entering, addressing himself to Jack, as the most sensible of the whole party.

"Oh, Dr Middleton," interrupted Mrs Easy, "he has cut his hand; I'm sure that a nerve is divided, and then the lock-jaw——"

The Doctor made no reply, but examined the finger: Jack Easy continued to play bob-cherry with his right hand.

"Have you such a thing as a piece of sticking-plaster in the house, madam?" observed the Doctor, after examination.

"O yes:—run, Mary,—run, Sarah!" In a few seconds the maids appeared, Sarah bringing the sticking-plaster, and Mary following with the scissors.

"Make yourself quite easy, madam," said Dr Middleton, after he put on the plaster, "I will answer for no evil consequences."

"Had I not better take him upstairs, and let him lie down a little?" replied Mrs Easy, slipping a guinea into the Doctor's hand.

"It is not absolutely requisite, madam," said the Doctor; "but at all events he will be kept out of more mischief."

"Come, my dear, you hear what Dr Middleton says."

"Yes, I heard," replied Jack; "but I sha'n't go."

"My dear Johnny—come, love—now do, my dear Johnny."

Johnny played bob-cherry, and made no answer.

"Come, Master Johnny," said Sarah.

"Go away, Sarah," said Johnny, with a back-hander.

"Oh! fie, Master Johnny," said Mary.

"Johnny, my love," said Mrs Easy in a coaxing tone, "come now—will you go?"

"I'll go in the garden and get some more cherries," replied Master Johnny.

"Come, then, love, we will go into the garden."

Master Johnny jumped off his chair, and took his mamma by the hand.

"What a dear, good, obedient child it is!" exclaimed Mrs Easy; "you may lead him with a thread."

"Yes, to pick cherries," thought Dr Middleton.

Mrs Easy, and Johnny, and Sarah, and Mary, went into the garden, leaving Dr Middleton alone with Mr Easy, who had been silent during this scene. Now Dr Middleton was a clever, sensible man, who had no wish to impose upon anyone. As for his taking a guinea for putting on a piece of sticking-plaster, his conscience was very easy on that score. His time was equally valuable, whether he were employed for something or nothing; and, moreover, he attended the poor gratis. Constantly in the house, he had seen much of Mr John Easy, and perceived that he was a courageous, decided boy, of a naturally good disposition; but from the idiosyncracy of the father, and the doating folly of the mother, in a sure way of being spoiled. As soon, therefore, as the lady was out of hearing, he took a chair, and made the query

at the commencement of the chapter, which we shall now repeat.

"Have you no idea of putting the boy to school, Mr Easy?"

Mr Easy crossed his legs, and clasped his hands together over his knees, as he always did when he was about to commence an argument.

"The great objection that I have to sending a boy to school, Dr Middleton, is, that I conceive that the discipline enforced is, not only contrary to the rights of man, but also in opposition to all sound sense and common judgment. Not content with punishment, which is in itself erroneous, and an infringement of social justice, they even degrade the minds of the boys still more by applying punishment to the most degraded part, adding contumely to tyranny. Of course, it is intended that a boy who is sent to school should gain by precept and example; but is he to learn benevolence by the angry look and the flourish of the vindictive birch,—or forbearance, by the cruelty of the ushers,—or patience, when the masters over him are out of all patience,—or modesty, when his nether parts are exposed to general examination? Is he not daily reading a lesson at variance with that equality which we all possess, but of which we are unjustly deprived? Why should there be a distinction between the flogger and the floggee? Are they not both fashioned alike after God's image, endowed with the same reason, having an equal right to what the world offers, and which was intended by Providence to be equally distributed? Is it not that the sacred inheritance of all, which has tyrannously and impiously been ravished from the many for the benefit of the few, and which ravishment, from long custom of iniquity and inculcation of false precepts, has too long been basely submitted to? Is it not the duty of a father to preserve his only son from imbibing these dangerous and debasing errors, which will render him only one of a vile herd who are content to suffer, provided that they live? And yet are not these very errors inculcated at