



***BOOTH  
TARKINGTON***

***HIS  
OWN  
PEOPLE***

**Booth Tarkington**

# **His Own People**

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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

[I. A Change of Lodging](#)

[II. Music on the Pincio](#)

[III. Glamour](#)

[IV. Good Fellowship](#)

[V. Lady Mount Rhyswicke](#)

[VI. Rake's Progress](#)

[VII. The Next Morning](#)

[VIII. What Cornish Knew](#)

[IX. Expiation](#)

[X. The Cab at the Corner](#)

# I. A Change of Lodging

## [Table of Contents](#)

The glass-domed “palm-room” of the Grand Continental Hotel Magnifique in Rome is of vasty heights and distances, filled with a mellow green light which filters down languidly through the upper foliage of tall palms, so that the two hundred people who may be refreshing or displaying themselves there at the tea-hour have something the look of under-water creatures playing upon the sea-bed. They appear, however, to be unaware of their condition; even the ladies, most like anemones of that gay assembly, do not seem to know it; and when the Hungarian band (crustacean-like in costume, and therefore well within the picture) has sheathed its flying tentacles and withdrawn by dim processes, the tea-drinkers all float out through the doors, instead of bubbling up and away through the filmy roof. In truth, some such exit as that was imagined for them by a young man who remained in the aquarium after they had all gone, late one afternoon of last winter. They had been marvelous enough, and to him could have seemed little more so had they made such a departure. He could almost have gone that way himself, so charged was he with the uplift of his belief that, in spite of the brilliant strangeness of the hour just past, he had been no fish out of water.

While the waiters were clearing the little tables, he leaned back in his chair in a content so rich it was nearer ecstasy. He could not bear to disturb the possession joy had taken of him, and, like a half-awake boy clinging to a dream that his hitherto unkind sweetheart has kissed him, lingered

on in the enchanted atmosphere, his eyes still full of all they had beheld with such delight, detaining and smiling upon each revelation of this fresh memory—the flashingly lovely faces, the dreamily lovely faces, the pearls and laces of the anemone ladies, the color and romantic fashion of the uniforms, and the old princes who had been pointed out to him: splendid old men wearing white mustaches and single eye-glasses, as he had so long hoped and dreamed they did.

“Mine own people!” he whispered. “I have come unto mine own at last. Mine own people!” After long waiting (he told himself), he had seen them—the people he had wanted to see, wanted to know, wanted to be *of*! Ever since he had begun to read of the “beau monde” in his schooldays, he had yearned to know some such sumptuous reality as that which had come true to-day, when, at last, in Rome he had seen—as he wrote home that night—“the finest essence of Old-World society mingling in Cosmopolis.”

Artificial odors (too heavy to keep up with the crowd that had worn them) still hung about him; he breathed them deeply, his eyes half-closed and his lips noiselessly formed themselves to a quotation from one of his own poems:

While trails of scent, like cobweb's films  
Slender and faint and rare,  
Of roses, and rich, fair fabrics,  
Cling on the stirless air,  
The sibilance of voices,  
At a wave of Milady's glove,  
Is stilled—

He stopped short, interrupting himself with a half-cough of laughter as he remembered the inspiration of these verses. He had written them three months ago, at home in

Cranston, Ohio, the evening after Anna McCord's "coming-out tea." "Milady" meant Mrs. McCord; she had "stilled" the conversation of her guests when Mary Kramer (whom the poem called a "sweet, pale singer") rose to sing Mavourneen; and the stanza closed with the right word to rhyme with "glove." He felt a contemptuous pity for his little, untraveled, provincial self of three months ago, if, indeed, it could have been himself who wrote verses about Anna McCord's "coming-out tea" and referred to poor, good old Mrs. McCord as "Milady"!

The second stanza had intimated a conviction of a kind which only poets may reveal:

She sang to that great assembly,  
They thought, as they praised her tone;  
But she and my heart knew better:  
Her song was for me alone.

He had told the truth when he wrote of Mary Kramer as pale and sweet, and she was paler, but no less sweet, when he came to say good-by to her before he sailed. Her face, as it was at the final moment of the protracted farewell, shone before him very clearly now for a moment: young, plaintive, white, too lamentably honest to conceal how much her "God-speed" to him cost her. He came very near telling her how fond of her he had always been; came near giving up his great trip to remain with her always.

"Ah!" He shivered as one shivers at the thought of disaster narrowly averted. "The fates were good that I only came near it!"

He took from his breast-pocket an engraved card, without having to search for it, because during the few days the