LANE Yes, sir.

[*Exit*]

JACK Do you mean to say you have had my cigarette case all this time? I wish to goodness you had let me know. I have been writing frantic letters to Scotland Yard about it. I was very nearly offering a reward.

ALGERNON Well, I wish you would offer one. I happen to be more than usually hard up.

JACK There is no good offering a reward now that the thing is found.

[*Enter* LANE, *with cigarette case on salver.* ALGERNON *takes it.* LANE *goes out*]

ALGERNON I must say, I think that is rather horrid of you, Ernest. [*Opens case and examines it*] However, it makes no matter; for now that I look at the inscription inside, I find that the thing isn't yours after all.

JACK [*irritably*] Of course it is mine. You have seen me with it a hundred times, and you have no right whatsoever to read what is written inside. It is a very ungentlemanly thing to read a private cigarette case.

ALGERNON Oh! It is absurd to have a hard and fast rule about what one should read and what one shouldn't. One should read everything. That is the true basis of modern culture. More than half of modern culture depends on what one shouldn't read.

JACK I am quite aware of that fact; and I don't propose to discuss modern culture. I simply want my cigarette case back.

ALGERNON Yes, but this isn't your cigarette case. This

cigarette case is a present from someone of the name of Cecily, and you said you didn't know anyone of that name.

JACK I said I didn't remember knowing anyone of that name. I do remember now. She is my aunt.

ALGERNON Your aunt?

JACK Yes, charming old lady she is, too. Lives at Tunbridge Wells. Just give it back to me, Algy. [*Goes across stage to take it*]

ALGERNON [*retreating*] But why does she call herself little Cecily, if she is your aunt and lives at Tunbridge Wells? [*Reads*] "From little Cecily, with her fondest love."

JACK My dear fellow, what on earth is there in that? Some aunts are tall, some aunts are not tall. That is a matter that surely an aunt may be allowed to decide for herself. *You* seem to think that every aunt should be exactly like your aunt. That is absurd. For Heaven's sake give me back my cigarette case. [*Advances*]

ALGERNON [*sheltering himself behind table*] Yes, but why does your aunt call you her uncle? "From little Cecily with her fondest love to dear Uncle Jack." There is no objection I admit, to an aunt being a small aunt, but why an aunt, no matter what her size may be, should call her own nephew her uncle, I can't make out. Besides, your name isn't Jack at all. It is Ernest.

JACK It isn't Ernest—it's Jack.

ALGERNON You have always told me it was Ernest. I have introduced you to everyone as Ernest. You answer to the name of Ernest. You look as if your name was Ernest. It is perfectly absurd your saying that your name isn't Ernest. Why! it's on your cards. Here is one of them. "Mr

Ernest Worthing, B.4, The Albany, W." Now I'll keep this as a proof that your name is Ernest, if you ever attempt to deny it, to me or to Gwendolen or to anybody else.

JACK Well, my name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country. And the cigarette case was given to me in the country.

ALGERNON Yes, but that does not account for the fact that your small aunt Cecily, who lives at Tunbridge Wells, calls you her dear uncle. Come, old boy, you had much better have the thing out at once.

JACK My dear Algy, you talk exactly as if you were a dentist. It is very vulgar to talk like a dentist when one isn't a dentist. It produces a false impression.

ALGERNON Well, that is exactly what dentists always do. Now go on: tell me the whole thing. I may mention that I have always suspected you of being a confirmed and secret Bunburyist; and I am quite sure of it now.

JACK What on earth do you mean by a Bunburyist?

ALGERNON I'll reveal to you the meaning of that incomparable expression as soon as you are kind enough to inform me why you are Ernest in town and Jack in the country.

JACK Well, produce my cigarette case first.

ALGERNON Here it is. [*Hands cigarette case*] Now produce your explanation; and pray make it remarkable.

JACK My dear fellow, there is nothing remarkable about this explanation at all. In fact it is perfectly ordinary. Old Mr Thomas Cardew, who adopted me when I was a little boy, under rather peculiar circumstances, and left me all the money I possess, made me in his will guardian to his