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The Merry Gentleman

A Musical

Dorothy Reynolds and Julian Slade

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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ISBN 978-0-573-08062-3

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CHARACTERS

Father Christmas
Aunt Mabel
Henrietta, her niece and god-daughter
Alison, Henrietta's first cousin, twice removed
Mr Ough, Henrietta's father
Burgess, a friend of the family, thought of as Cousin
Uncle Charles, distantly related to Mabel
Violet, Mabel's maid
Abel, **Disabel** } her two dumb waiters
Edward, a newcomer
Edith, **Dora**, **Biddie**, **Rosie**, **Sidney**, **Eustace** } Cousins
Rudolf, **Rufus** } two Reindeer
Snowman

ACT I Mabel's drawing-room and the roof-tops. Christmas Night
ACT II Christmasland
ACT III Mabel's drawing-room

Time—1910

THE MERRY GENTLEMAN

First performed at the Theatre Royal, Bristol, on December 24th, 1953, with the following cast:

Aunt Mabel	Dorothy Reynolds
Violet, her maid	Pat Heywood
Abel } two dumb waiters	Bob Harris
Disabel } two dumb waiters	Alan Dobie
Cousin Margot	Barbara Leigh-Hunt
Cousin Rosie	Gillian Lewis
Cousin Thelma	Pat Routledge
Biddy	Lesley Nunnerley
Cousin Jack	Roy Skelton
Cousin Wally	Patrick Horgan
Burgess	John Warner
Alison	Joan Plowright
Edward	Donal Harron
Henrietta	Jan Wenham
Mr Ough, her father	James Cairncross
Uncle Charles	Norman Rossington
Father Christmas	David Bird

Produced by **Lionel Harris**
Settings by **Tom Lingwood**

THE SONGS

ACT I

1	Candles At Christmastime	The Company
2	Let's Start The Party	The Company
3	A Face In A Photograph	Henrietta
4	The Umbrella Song	Burgess and Chorus
5	There's Only One Father Christmas	Charles, Edward and Father Christmas
6	A First Cousin	Alison and Chorus
7	The Clue From The Cracker	The Company
8	The Sleigh Song	The Company

ACT II

9	Don't Be Rude to a Reindeer	Rudolf and Rufus
10	Search	Father Christmas and the Company
11	Speak To Me Snowman	Henrietta and Snowman
12	Speak To Me Snowman (*reprise*)	Alison and Burgess
13	Poor Henrietta, Poor Alison A Face In a Photograph (*reprise*)	Henrietta and Alison Henrietta
14	Try A Little Bit of Moonshine	Father Christmas, Mabel and Violet
15	Try A Little Bit of Moonshine (*reprise*)	Charles and Chorus
16	I'd Love To Be In Love With You	Henrietta and Edward
17	The Snowfall Waltz	

ACT III

17a	Try A Little Bit of Moonshine (*reprise*)	Charles and Cousins
18	The Merry Gentleman	Father Christmas and Company
19	Ough	Mabel and Mr Ough
20	The Umbrella Song (*reprise*)	Alison and Burgess
20a	The Clue From The Cracker (*reprise*)	Henrietta and Edward
21	It's The Thought That Matters	Cousins
22	Finale	The Company

The music for this play is available from Samuel French Ltd

THE MERRY GENTLEMAN

The Merry Gentleman opened on Christmas Eve, 1953, at the Theatre Royal, Bristol. Dorothy Reynolds and I had met eighteen months before as members of the Bristol Old Vic Company and had already collaborated on another Christmas show—*Christmas in King Street*—which several years later we turned into a musical for London called *Follow That Girl.*

In the first production of *The Merry Gentleman* we were fortunate in having having a distinguished cast. As well as such established players as Dorothy Reynolds herself, James Cairncross, David Bird, Jane Wenham and John Warner, the show presented such outstanding "newcomers" as Joan Plowright, Pat Heywood, Patricia Routledge, Barbara Leigh-Hunt and Alan Dobie. It was during the run of *The Merry Gentleman* that Dorothy Reynolds and I were asked by the Director of the Bristol Old Vic, Denis Carey, to write a summer show for the Company. This turned out to be *Salad Days* which in August 1954 was transferred to the Vaudeville Theatre, London, where it beat all existing records for a musical by running for five and a half years.

The Merry Gentleman was revived twice at Bristol, first at the Little Theatre in 1970 and then back at the Theatre Royal again in 1983.

The intention behind this show is to present as many of the aspects of Christmas as possible—warmth, nostalgia and at times magic or absurdity—or both! My hope is that some of these intentions are as relevant now as they appeared to us in 1953.

Julian Slade, 1985

ACT I*

A comfortable drawing-room, somewhere out of London, in the year 1910. Christmas Night

There is a large fireplace back C *with two doors on either side of it, and exits into both wings. Off* L *is the hall, and off* R *a dining-room that has been cleared for supper and dancing. There is a minimum of furniture but just enough to make the room look cosy. It hardly needs more than a settee and one armchair (or possibly a large pouffe). Standing near the fireplace is a beautifully decorated Christmas tree, at the foot of which is a giant cracker. There are presents hung on the tree and piled up around it*

When the CURTAIN *rises, the stage is dark except for the glow of the fire. Unseen the Company is singing softly (pre-recorded)*

During the song, Aunt Mabel enters with a lighted taper and lights the candles on the tree

Song 1: Candles At Christmastime

Company Candles at Christmastime
We bring them out at Christmastime
We light them every year
And as the flames appear
We feel the joy and cheer
Of Christmastime.

When the snow is falling falling
And the elements fright you
The Christmas tree is calling calling
And the candles invite you.

Candles at Christmastime
We welcome them at Christmastime
They twinkle on the tree
As pretty as can be
The perfect sight to see
At Christmastime.

By the time the song is over the Lights are fully up. The music modulates into "Let's Start the Party" and is held behind the following:

Mabel (*humming*) "Good-evening—Good-evening" (*She notices the audience and speaks*) Oh, good-evening. I'm Aunt Mabel . . . spinster . . .

*N.B. Paragraph 3 on page ii of this Acting Edition regarding photocopying and video-recording should be carefully read.

of this parish. This is my tree, my fire, my house. And it's my party. I always give one, you know, every Christmas Night—for the young people in the family. Not strictly the family of course—they bring their friends. But it's usually the same lot. There's my god-daughter, Henrietta—most important. And her father—he's rather sweet. He's a widower. (*She smiles confidingly*) Then there's Uncle Charles—he always dresses up as Father Christmas. He loves doing it—it makes him feel so important. Only he can't come this year. He's got influenza. I think we shall manage without him—I've invited someone to take his place. Then there's Cousin Alison, Cousin Burgess—he's not really a cousin but we think of him as one—and perhaps half a dozen others—all very charming and very welcome—like yourselves. They seem to be arriving now. You'll excuse me, won't you?

Violet, a maid, and Abel and Disabel, two menservants, enter from one side with trays of drinks. Abel is young and bright, Disabel is exceedingly old and decrepit

From the other side, the Guests enter severally, during the following verse

Song 2: Let's Start The Party

Mabel
Servants Good-evening
Cousins Good-evening
Mabel
Servants How are you?
Cousins Quite well, thank you.
How cosy and sweet
It's so lovely to meet
Mabel
Servants Is it cold outside?

Burgess, Alison and Edward enter

Good-evening
Burgess
Alison
Edward Good-evening
Mabel
Servants How are you?
Burgess
Alison
Edward Quite well, thank you.
Mabel
Servants What will you drink?
Burgess
Alison
Edward Now just let me think
It's so hard to decide.

Henrietta and Mr Ough enter

Mabel / **Servants** Good-evening

Henrietta / **Mr Ough** Good-evening.

Mabel / **Servants** How are you?

Henrietta / **Mr Ough** Quite well, thank you.

Mabel What a charming dress!
Henrietta It is old, I confess
I have just had it dyed
1st Half How are you?
2nd Half How are you?
1st Half How's Grandma? And Clara? And Sarah?
Aunt Minnie? And Winnie?
And Mister Smith's sister? (*Pause*)
And Uncle Tom? (*Pause*)
2nd Half Quite well thank you.
All (*solemnly*) We are cousin, niece or brother
Or the friend of someone's mother
And we're polite to each other. (*Pause*)
1st Half Good-evening
2nd Half Good-evening
All How are——

A rigid pause, then Henrietta and Alison exchange looks and break in

Henrietta Excuse us, Aunt Mabel,
If we interrupt
Alison Forgive us, pray
If what we say
Seems a little abrupt
Henrietta It's this—
Couldn't we miss
The conventionality?
Alison And be
Happy and free
Both Without formality?
All Let's start the party right away
Today is Christmas Day
And a Christmas party ought to be gay
Let's start the party right away
Let's dance and sing and play
We are glad we've come, we're happy to stay!
Parties should not
Be too sedate
Start them early
And end them late

Let's start the party right away
Today is Christmas Day
And a Christmas party ought to be gay!

The song now becomes a "double" number. While the girls repeat the previous refrain, "Let's start the party . . ." etc., all the men sing the following:

Men Conversation too polite
Can continue half the night
We must not be dreary family bores
(We must not be dreary bores)
Let's forget the clothes we wear
Shiny shoes and tidy hair
Let's forget those dull society laws
(Let's forget those dull old laws)
Let's lose our dignity
And joy in letting it go! (Away with it!)
Our Christmas party comes
But once a year as you know (Make hay with it!)
Choose the way to have your fun
It's not the same for everyone
Do the things you've always wanted to do
(Do the things you want to do!)

All Let's start the party
Right away! Right away!
Let's start the party right away!

Mabel and the Guests dance off R *towards the supper-room*

During the song, Abel and Disabel have been just sufficiently in evidence. While both are capable of joining in the sung choruses, neither ever speaks a word

After the general exit Abel and Violet clear a glass or two and exit smartly, possibly with a pinch and giggle on the way

Disabel picks up a solitary glass and begins a long, long trail towards the exit

He is not half-way there when Burgess enters with his umbrella. Burgess looks about him, walks up and down, swaggers, and finally speaks to Disabel who is by now almost at the exit

Burgess Will you ask Miss Henrietta if she will be good enough to have a word with me?

Disabel bows and totters off

Abel enters. He is about to cross, but stays to watch Burgess with innocent fascination

Burgess swaggers, smoothes his hair, lays hand to heart, embraces his umbrella with sudden passion and murmurs "I love you". He turns, sees Abel. Abel bows, relieves him of his umbrella and is about to go off with it

(*Frenzied*) No, no, no, no, no! (*Retrieving it, he pants a little*) Thank you, I prefer to keep it.

Abel retires behind the tree but reappears at once covertly to watch Burgess who is now kneeling and passionately mouthing. The umbrella incommodes him. He lays it aside

Abel dodges away as Alison enters

Alison Burgess!
Burgess (*leaping up, dusting his knees and seizing the umbrella*) Oh, hullo Alison.
Alison Dear Burgess, had you fallen down?
Burgess No.
Alison (*tenderly*) Did you hurt yourself?
Burgess I hadn't fallen I tell you.
Alison Oh. Did you drop something?
Burgess No, thank you.
Alison (*hopeful*) Were you waiting for someone, perhaps?
Burgess As a matter of fact I was.

Alison comes closer

The most beautiful girl in all the world.

Alison blossoms

Alison Oh Burgess!
Burgess (*looking straight past her, off*) Oh Henrietta!
Alison (*sharp with disappointment*) Shall I take your umbrella and put it in the hall for you?
Burgess No, thank you. I like to have it. It gives me confidence.
Alison I wish I had something to give me confidence.
Burgess (*bored*) Do you?
Alison (*sighing*) Here's Henrietta.

Henrietta enters, carrying her handbag, followed by Abel, who goes behind the tree

Henrietta Burgess dear—oh Alison, how lovely you look in that dress!
Alison (*drifting away*) What's the use of looking lovely? It does me no good.

Alison exits

Henrietta Poor Alison! She always seems so sad these days.
Burgess Does she?
Henrietta You wanted to see me Burgess? Oh, no-one's relieved you of your umbrella. Let me——
Burgess No, no, no, it's all right. (*Gaily*) You can lose umbrellas that way, you know—leaving them in the hall. The umbrellas I've lost that way! Oh people don't mean to *steal* them, I realize that. It's just that they take them by mistake. And then where are you? You're without an umbrella! The money I've spent on umbrellas in a single year!
Henrietta Really? I'm sorry.
Burgess Oh it doesn't matter. I can well afford it.
Henrietta Yes, you're looking prosperous. We've hardly met since last Christmas, have we?

Burgess No, but I've thought of you, Henrietta.
Henrietta Have you?
Burgess I always do, but particularly this year because it's been rather a good one for me.
Henrietta I'm so glad.
Burgess Yes, I've been promoted. I'm Area Manager now.
Henrietta Congratulations! It sounds important.
Burgess It is rather. I have my own office now, and my own secretary, and my own telephone. Also I happen to have been elected President of the Golf Club. (*He swings his umbrella like a club*)
Henrietta Because of your game, I expect.
Burgess Oh yes. And the chaps like me, you know.
Henrietta I'm sure they do.
Burgess People do like me. I've discovered that. I don't know why it is. Being able to play the piano at parties—that sort of thing. Yes, all-in-all, a *very* good year. It's funny, I've known you ever since we were children, and I used to come and play in your garden . . .
Henrietta Yes. Dear Burgess, I've always thought of you as one of the family——
Burgess "Dear Burgess" you said! (*Fervently kneeling, incommoded by the umbrella*) Oh, but I'm *not* one of the family. I'm not related to you, dearest Henrietta!
Henrietta Burgess!
Burgess Darling Henrietta——(*He lays the umbrella aside*)
Henrietta Why are you kneeling down? Get up!
Burgess There's nothing in the world I'd like more than to be related to you!

Abel comes from behind the tree, takes the umbrella, hangs it on the mantelpiece, and retires

Henrietta How do you mean? I'll get Father to adopt you, if you like.
Burgess Oh not in that way you funny little thing! I mean Henrietta, will you——? (*He stops, abruptly suspicious, turns and sees his umbrella has gone*)
Henrietta What is it, Burgess? You were saying, you mean——?
Burgess (*his attention gone*) I-I-I-I-I m-m-m-m-ean——?
Henrietta What's the matter?
Burgess N-n-n-n-othing. I-I-I- (*hopelessly*)-I've lost my umbrella.
Henrietta Never mind that now. You were saying . . .?
Burgess I seem to be kneeling down. How ridic-ridic-ridic——
Henrietta Not at all. You were telling me about your promotion.
Burgess Oh that. (*He looks round wildly*) I shall never be able to hold that job down.
Henrietta Why ever not?
Burgess The fact is it's too b-b-b-b-big for me. I've had a terrible year. Sometimes I don't know whether I'm on my head or my-my-my-my——
Henrietta You'll be all right. And then there's the golf-club.
Burgess It's hopeless.
Henrietta Why?

Burgess They only elected me because I'm easy to p-p-push around. Nobody really likes me, you know. They're always saying things about me behind my back. I d-d-dread going there—you've no idea how awful it is—I-I-I——

Henrietta Oh look! There's your umbrella, hanging on the mantelpiece.

Burgess What? Oh so it is? (*He takes it, swings it laughing, and plays a golf stroke*) However did it get there?

Henrietta You were saying, Burgess . . .?

Burgess Was I? Oh yes. (*Loudly*) I was saying Henrietta, that I've had a remarkably good year.

Mabel sweeps in and seizes Burgess's umbrella

Mabel Burgess! Has no-one relieved you of your umbrella? I'm so sorry. Abel!

Abel appears

Take this.

Abel goes off

Henrietta stifles her laughter. Burgess looks a picture of misery

Mabel My dear, I do hope you're enjoying the party. You don't look as if you are.

Burgess Oh yes, th-th-thank you.

Mabel I want you to play the piano for us, you know.

Burgess Oh no, I've lost the ha-ha-ha-hang of it somehow, I-I-I——

Mabel Well go and say nice things to Cousin Alison for me. Look she's over there, looking so lonely and sad.

Burgess If you s-say so. Will you excu-cu-cu-cu——

The end of the word fails to come. He bows with tongue-tied rigidity to both of them and goes

Henrietta laughs

Mabel You mustn't laugh at him, Henrietta. Poor little man!

Henrietta It isn't that, I've just realized——

Mabel Realized what?

Henrietta He was trying to propose to me.

Mabel Oh dear! I hope I didn't interrupt.

Henrietta (*laughing*) No!

Mabel I suppose you've no thought of accepting him?

Henrietta Burgess? Oh no. I could never marry Burgess. And besides, the fact is—actually—there's someone else.

Mabel Henrietta!

Henrietta Yes. Oh Aunt Mabel, I've fallen so dreadfully in love.

Mabel My dearest child, I am delighted! Come and tell me all about it. (*She sits on the settee*)

Henrietta Oh thank you. (*She sits beside her*)

Mabel (*taking her hand*) Now—when did it happen?

Henrietta This morning.
Mabel Oh. It's all quite new.
Henrietta Yes.
Mabel What's his name?
Henrietta I don't know.
Mabel Oh. Where did you meet him?
Henrietta I've never met him.
Mabel You've never met him. You . . . saw him somewhere?
Henrietta No, I've never seen him.
Mabel You've never seen him. Go on, dear.

Song 3: A Face in a Photograph

Henrietta

He's only a face in a photograph
A picture without any name
He's not very smart or superior
He can't even boast of a frame—
But when I first saw him he looked at me
As no-one had looked at me before
He's only a face in a photograph
But he is the man I adore.

Some girls think an earl would be heaven-sent
But I never aimed as high as that
My hero is just an advertisement
He's not even glossy—he is matt.

He's only a face in a photograph
But love isn't always so blind
And I knew the moment I looked at him
That this was the man I must find
For somehow his face has enchanted me
My heart's not my own any more
He's only a face in a photograph
But he is the man I adore.

Mabel Well dear, it all sounds most romantic.
Henrietta (*in a dream*) Oh yes!
Mabel Where did you come across this photograph?
Henrietta In my stocking.
Mabel More and more romantic. What was it doing there?
Henrietta It was—it was—oh Aunt Mabel, I think you'd better know *everything*.
Mabel I think I'd better.

Henrietta opens her handbag and takes out a bottle. This should be quite large and come very obviously from a chemist rather than a wine-merchant. Henrietta holds it up rapturously

Henrietta There!

Mabel Where? Forgive me if I'm stupid, but why are you waving that bottle of medicine at me? Are you ill?

Henrietta Perhaps I am, just a little. But this isn't a medicine. This is an elixir.

Mabel A what?

Henrietta A tonic.

Mabel But you don't need a tonic, do you? (*Aside*) I shall, in a minute.

Henrietta No, no. You don't understand. The photograph is *on* the bottle of tonic. I told you. He's an advertisement, you see. (*She hands her the bottle*)

Mabel (*faintly*) I see. (*She reads*) "The Secret of Perpetual Happiness. Take MOONSHINE, for outer shine and inner shine. MOONSHINE—the Amazing New Health-giving, Life-giving, Youth-giving Elixir, propounded, expounded and compounded by the One and Only DR BEAMISH. Available at all chemists, three shillings and twopence a bottle." (*She points to the picture*) Dr Beamish I presume?

Henrietta runs to her and looks over her shoulder

Henrietta (*ecstatic*) Yes! (*She reads*) "Are you Tired and Worried?"

Mabel nods

"Nervous and Irritable?"

Mabel nods again

"Feeling your Age?"

Mabel passes a limp hand down her face and pats under her chin

"Take MOONSHINE!"

Mabel is about to take a swig, then recollects herself

Mabel Am I to understand, dear, that you are in love with this Dr Beamish?

Henrietta Oh yes! Can't you see why?

Mabel Not quite. But I'll persevere. (*Peering*) He does seem to have nice eyes.

Henrietta And a *lovely* smile.

Mabel (*baring her teeth*) Yes, it is rather dazzling.

Henrietta And a noble, manly forehead.

Mabel M'm. What one can see of it. That hair . . .

Henrietta What's the matter with his hair? It's beautiful hair. Dark—rich—luxuriant . . .

Mabel There's certainly a lot of it. But it does rather obscure the view don't you think? What with the moustache, and the beard, quite apart from what's on top. Really dear, I may be missing something, but it seems to me you might just as well have fallen in love with a bear-skin rug.

Henrietta (*snatching the bottle*) Oh you're beastly! I might have known you wouldn't understand.

Mabel I did say he had nice eyes.

Henrietta You're going to tell me to forget about the whole thing, aren't you? But it's no use, because I can't.

Mabel No, I wasn't going to tell you to do that. But there's one question I'd like to ask you, Henrietta. Who do you think *put* Dr Beamish in your stocking?

Henrietta (*sulkily stuffing the bottle back into her bag*) Father Christmas, I suppose.

Mabel There's always a good reason behind everything Father Christmas does.

Henrietta (*surprised by the conviction in her voice*) How do you know?

Mabel Surely we all know that, don't we? So there's only one thing for you to do about your Dr Beamish.

Henrietta (*suspiciously*) What's that?

Mabel Find him.

Henrietta Oh, darling Aunt Mabel! (*Embracing her*) You are the best, most understanding godmother a girl ever had! I *will* find Dr Beamish! I *will*! I'll find him even if I have to go to the other ends of the earth!

Mabel Oh I hope you won't have to go as far as that.

Henrietta is about to run off

Mr Ough and Edward enter. Absorbed in what he is saying Mr Ough leads Edward across stage ignoring the two ladies

Mr Ough . . . so when the last war came along, I tried to explain to my poor old mother—she was a little deaf by then—"No, Mother" I said. "This war we are fighting is not the Crimea, dear. It's the Boer War." "A good cause" she said. "No-one should ever be allowed to become a bore." . . . Ah, Mabel!

Henrietta (*aside to Mabel*) Don't tell him.

Mr Ough Don't tell me? Don't tell me what? Nobody ever tells me anything.

Henrietta (*kissing him*) You know that's not true, Father.

Mr Ough Henrietta, have you met—I'm sorry. I'm so bad at names.

Mabel Mr Edward Keene. This is my god-daughter, Henrietta.

Edward How do you do?

Henrietta How do you do, Mr Keene?

Mr Ough Lovely party as always, Mabel.

Henrietta Father, why don't you ask Aunt Mabel to dance?

Mr Ough Oh come, our dancing days are over.

Mabel raises an eyebrow

I'm sure your Aunt Mabel would rather sit down quietly and watch.

Henrietta Nonsense!

Mr Ough (*to Mabel laughing*) Dancing! At our age! Can you imagine it?

Mabel (*sweetly*) Just.

Mr Ough We don't know any of these modern things—all this rag-time and so on. In our day it was the Waltz—the Lancers—the Military Two-Step . . .

Mabel The Minuet . . .

Mr Ough Yes! No. Come now, Mabel, we don't go back as far as that.

Mabel Don't we? I was beginning to be afraid we did.

Hungry for More?

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