

My Brother Henry

by James M. Barrie

At first sight it may not, perhaps, seem quite the thing that I should be hilarious because I have at last had the courage to kill my brother Henry. For some time, however, Henry had been annoying me.

Strictly speaking, I never had a brother Henry. It is just fifteen months since I began to acknowledge that there was such a person. It came about in this way:—

I have a friend of the name of Fenton, who, like myself, lives in London. His house is so conveniently situated that I can go there and back in one day. About a year and a half ago I was at Fenton's, and he remarked that he had met a man the day before who knew my brother Henry. Not having a brother Henry, I felt that there must be a mistake somewhere; so I suggested that Fenton's friend had gone wrong in the name. My only brother, I pointed out with the suavity of manner that makes me a general favourite, was called Alexander. "Yes," said Fenton, "but he spoke of Alexander also." Even this did not convince me that I had a brother Henry, and I asked Fenton the name of his friend. Scudamour was the name, and the gentleman had met my brothers Alexander and Henry some six years previously in Paris.

When I heard this I probably frowned; for then I knew who my brother Henry was. Strange though it may seem, I was my own brother Henry. I distinctly remembered meeting this man Scudamour at Paris during the time that Alexander and I were there for a week's pleasure, and quarrelled every day. I explained this to Fenton; and there, for the time being, the matter rested.

I had, however, by no means heard the last of Henry. Several times afterwards I heard from various persons that Scudamour wanted to meet me because he knew my brother Henry. At last we did meet, at a Bohemian supper-party in Furnival's Inn; and, almost as soon as he saw me, Scudamour asked where Henry was now. This was precisely what I feared.

I am a man who always looks like a boy. There are few persons of my age in London who retain their boyish appearance as long as I have done; indeed, this is the curse of my life. Though I am approaching the age of thirty, I pass for twenty; and I have observed old gentlemen frown at my precocity when I said a good thing or helped myself to a second glass of wine. There was, therefore, nothing surprising in Scudamour's remark that, when he had the pleasure of meeting Henry, Henry must have been about the age that I had now reached.

All would have been well had I explained the real state of affairs to this annoying man; but, unfortunately for myself, I loathe entering upon explanations to anybody about anything. When I ring for my boots and my servant thinks I want a glass of water, I drink the water and remain indoors. Much, then, did I dread a discussion with Scudamour, his surprise when he heard that I was Henry (my Christian name is Thomas), and his comments on my youthful appearance.

Besides, I was at that moment carving a tough fowl; and, as I learned to carve from a handbook, I can make no progress unless I keep muttering to myself, "Cut from A to B, taking care to pass along the line C D, and sever the wing K from the body at the point F." There was no likelihood of my meeting Scudamour again, so the easiest way to get rid of him seemed to be to humour him. I therefore told him that Henry was in India, married, and doing

well. "Remember me to Henry when you write to him," was Scudamour's last remark to me that evening.

A few weeks later someone tapped me on the shoulder in Oxford Street. It was Scudamour. "Heard from Henry?" he asked. I said I had heard by the last mail. "Anything particular in the letter?" I felt it would not do to say there was nothing particular in a letter which had come all the way from India, so I hinted that Henry had had trouble with his wife. By this I meant that her health was bad; but he took it up in another way, and I did not set him right. "Ah, ah!" he said, shaking his head sagaciously, "I'm sorry to hear that. Poor Henry!" "Poor old boy!" was all I could think of replying.

"How about the children?" Scudamour asked. "Oh, the children," I said, with what I thought presence of mind, "are coming to England." "To stay with Alexander?" he asked; for Alexander is a married man. My answer was that Alexander was expecting them by the middle of next month; and eventually Scudamour went away muttering "Poor Henry!"

In a month or so we met again. "No word of Henry's getting leave of absence?" asked Scudamour. I replied shortly that Henry had gone to live in Bombay, and would not be home for years. He saw that I was brusque, so what does he do but draw me aside for a quiet explanation. "I suppose," he said, "you are annoyed because I told Fenton that Henry's wife had run away from him. The fact is I did it for your good. You see I happened to make a remark to Fenton about your brother Henry, and he said that there was no such person. Of course I laughed at that, and pointed out not only that I had the pleasure of Henry's acquaintance, but that you and I had a talk about the old fellow every time we met. 'Well,' Fenton said, 'this is a most remarkable thing; for Tom,' meaning you, 'said to me in this very room, sitting in that very chair, that Alexander was his only brother.' I saw that Fenton resented your

concealing the existence of your brother Henry from him, so I thought the most friendly thing I could do was to tell him that your reticence was doubtless due to the fact that Henry's private affairs were troubling you. Naturally, in the circumstances, you did not want to talk about Henry."

I shook Scudamour by the hand, telling him that he had acted judiciously; but if I could have stabbed him quietly at that moment I dare say I should have done it.

I did not see Scudamour again for a long time, for I took care to keep out of his way; but I heard first from him and then of him. One day he wrote to me saying that his nephew was going to Bombay, and would I be so good as to give the youth an introduction to my brother Henry? He also asked me to dine with him and his nephew. I declined the dinner, but I sent the nephew the required note of introduction to Henry.

The next I heard of Scudamour was from Fenton. "By the way," said Fenton, "Scudamour is in Edinburgh at present." I trembled, for Edinburgh is where Alexander lives. "What has taken him there?" I asked, with assumed carelessness. Fenton believed it was business; "but," he added, "Scudamour asked me to tell you that he meant to call on Alexander, as he was anxious to see Henry's children."

A few days afterwards I had a telegram from Alexander, who generally uses this means of communication when he corresponds with me. "Do you know a man Scudamour? reply," was what Alexander said. I thought of answering that we had met a man of that name when we were in Paris; but, on the whole, replied boldly: "Know no one of the name of Scudamour."

About two months ago I passed Scudamour in Regent Street, and he did not recognise me. This I could have borne if there had been no more of Henry; but I knew that Scudamour was now telling everybody about Henry's wife.

By-and-by I got a letter from an old friend of Alexander's, asking me if there was any truth in a report that Alexander was going to Bombay. Soon afterwards Alexander wrote to me to say that he had been told by several persons that I was going to Bombay.

In short, I saw that the time had come for killing Henry. So I told Fenton that Henry had died of fever, deeply regretted; and asked him to be sure to tell Scudamour, who had always been interested in the deceased's welfare.

The other day Fenton told me that he had communicated the sad intelligence to Scudamour. "How did he take it?" I asked. "Well," Fenton said, reluctantly, "he told me that when he was up in Edinburgh he did not get on well with Alexander; but he expressed great curiosity as to Henry's children." "Ah," I said, "the children were both drowned in the Forth; a sad affair—we can't bear to talk of it."

I am not likely to see much of Scudamour again, nor is Alexander. Scudamour now goes about saying that Henry was the only one of us he really liked.