



# What the Butler Winked At: Being the Life and Adventures of Eric Horne, Butler

*Eric Horne*

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Eric Horne served as a butler in some of the great English country manors from the 1860s until just after World War I, when many of the families whose heirs died in battle were forced to sell off their homes. Born in Southampton, Horne came from a humble family who valued education. Horne excelled in school and wished to go to sea, but lacking his parents' permission, he instead ended up as a footboy for a local household. Over the years, Horne moved up in the service of the aristocracy: his goal was to become butler to the king of England, a position he very nearly secured. He did end up in the service of several distinguished households for many decades, and upon his retirement in 1922, he decided to write his memoir. Horne is a unique voice; not only did he have intimate contact with his employers and the household staff, he also possessed literary talent, so that his account provides authentic detail as well as shrewd—and often witty—views of the aristocracy, the servants, and their activities. Horne is not sentimental though; he does not think that he used his life wisely, having never learned a true trade. He reveals the plight of the servant class, where once a butler lost his employment—particularly following the devastation of World War I—he was likely to end up in a poorhouse, because employers did not usually provide pensions and servants were rarely able to save enough money to survive on their own. *What the Butler Winked At* is a fascinating and essential account of life in a country house during the height of the Victorian and Edwardian eras.

“A splendidly rumbustious kind of memoir.”—Jeremy Musson in *Up and Down Stairs: The History of the Country House Servant*

“A first rate book. The world is treated to one more of those human documents, written without guile or pretension. Eric Horne is a keen student of human life.”—*New York World*

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