



Paying Guests

E.F. Benson

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We are at “Wentworth,” a guest house in the fictional town of Bolton Spa, which offers baths and nasty-smelling waters to a group of permanent invalids. Wentworth is terribly genteel, recognized not only for the comfort it offers but also for the social standing of its guests. Who — this being a Benson novel — are silly at best, stupendously annoying at worst. The stars of the show are the pompous, self-regarding Colonel Chase, a former Indian Army officer who lords it over the other guests at Wentworth, bragging incessantly about his excellent health and bullying them all at the bridge table, a pair of middle-aged spinsters who later become a couple and a Mrs. Bliss who espouses Mental Science, a thin disguise for Christian Science...

Paying Guests Details

Date : Published December 27th 1987 by Chatto & Windus

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Author : E.F. Benson

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From Reader Review Paying Guests for online ebook

Judith says

Not the same book I had in mind - however, E. F. Benson is quite an entertaining author. Will keep looking for the other book.

Janet says

Bolton Spa lacks the inimitable Lucia, but the remarkable Col. Chase (Indian Army, ret'd) makes up for it.

Elizabeth Thomsen says

Paying Guests by E. F. Benson (1984)

Chris says

Good story, though left a bit hanging at the end. Just a bit though. It was interesting to read the period details of London after World War I.

Anna Gordon says

Flashes of Benson's brilliant eye for the peculiarities and vanities of ordinary people, but he could have done with a good editor for this work. It's not up to his usual structural standard and is full of too much rambling minutiae about each character which becomes as annoying as if you were a fellow paying guest yourself and stuck with them each breakfast and dinner time. There are some fascinating elements though: two women falling in love and giving two fingers to a pompous male, being the most obvious; pompous male learning nothing from his experience. However, if you've finished the Mapp and Lucia stories and want to try something else, go for Mrs Ames and not this.

Sarah says

Not quite as good as the Lucia books, but still very enjoyable.

Pat Newman says

I am not reading this book and cannot find out how to delete it from my list.

Alan says

Benson, the son of an Archbishop of Canterbury (who built the Cathedral in Truro, Cornwall), and the brother of some serious clerics, is unlike his brothers, a hoot. Everybody knows this from the Lucia series, but for anyone who's ever stayed at a B&B or rooming house, this may be funnier. Benson wrote almost a hundred books, including three or four biographies and memoirs; one tells of Queen Victoria's visit to their home. EFB will never be "taught" in colleges, and that raises questions about the whole enterprise of literature classes. He's too funny to be included, and he writes with too much ease. But surely Chaucer was funny, and wrote with ease.

Bev says

I just can't resist British wit. Loved it.

Susan says

What happens to social satire when time and change erase the very characters being satirized? In this case, the humor remains. A number of people stay at an upscale boarding house at an English health resort. The main characters include a self-important retired colonel, a hypochondriac parasite and his put-upon daughter, the devotee of a religion that believes in Mind above all things, and a middle aged spinster with an interest in the arts. Benson's gentle touch leaves them all happier in the end than, perhaps, they deserve, but only after they've been through some embarrassment and emotional turmoil.

Eric says

Such fun! Not quite as tart as Mapp and Lucia but nevertheless an entertaining account of the inhabitants of Wentworth, a superior boarding house in a provincial spa town.

The foibles and failings of a variety of characters- a choleric colonel, a hypochondriac, some gushing spinsters among them - are cleverly depicted.

The pretensions of the middle classes and minor aristocracy are firmly dealt with and a few shots are aimed at Christian Science, art criticism and musical snobbery.

A good light read.

Ju says

Definitely light-hearted. Liked the old-fashioned style of writing and there were several words I had to look

up because they just aren't used anymore.

Chris Passingham says

I read this as a prototype for the Mapp and Lucia series. Miss Howard was obviously an early version of Lucia and most of the other characters were recognisable as well.

Kate says

"Bolton Spa is infamous for two things: the nauseating quality of its brine and the parsimony of its boarding houses. Exceptional is the Wentworth. Every summer this luxurious establishment is full of paying guests come to sample the waters, the constant hot meals, the happy family atmosphere. The register reveals a chronicle of acrimony and arthritis. There is Mrs Bliss, limping violently, who proclaims Mind the Omnipotent cure; Mr Kemp, a raving hypochondriac, persecuting his beleaguered daughter Florence; Miss Alice Howard, horrendously extemporising on the pianoforte; and, lord of all, Col. Chase (Indian Army, ret'd) -- at the top of his form as boor, cyclist and enraged grump. Their battles are fought with pedometer, walking stick and paintbrush; at the bridge table, the town concert, at afternoon tea. Their triumphs, unforgettably and hilariously recorded here, will be relished throughout the land for years to come.

Paying Guests -- out of print since the '30s -- is considered one of the finest examples of E.F. Benson's work, ranking with the very best of P.G. Wodehouse.

~~from the back cover

Very understated British humour. Mapp & Lucia is still my favorite, but this one is quite good as well.

Charlotte says

A typical Bensonian romp complete with outrageously unlikeable characters, in spite of whom you can't wait to read on. If you are a Lucia fan, do read this!
