‘Easiest of Visitors’

LADY MARGARET OLIVIER

From a letter by Lord Olivier to Archibald Henderson, 8 June 1931, in Henderson, *Bernard Shaw, Playboy and Prophet* (London and New York: D. Appleton, 1932) p. 787. Sydney Olivier married Margaret Cox in 1885: they had four daughters. He enclosed in a letter of his own these reminiscences by his wife, which probably belong to the 1890s.

Mr Shaw was very popular with my children. I remember when we were living at Limpsfield in Surrey, returning one day from a walk to find him sitting on the grass, resigned and patient, amid several aggressive children who, he declared, had been beating him with drain pipes.

And another scene I remember. I think he had been with us for the night and I, having to go out, had left him, as I hoped, to spend a quiet morning. On returning I heard music in the house, and going into the room I found him seated at the piano with children on each side pressing as close against him as they could and all together singing loudly and cheerfully the ballad of ‘Barbara Allen’. They were steadily working through our *Old English Song Book*.

He was one of the kindest and easiest of visitors. One Sunday evening (my nurse, I suppose, being absent) he quickly noticed that, he being there, I was wondering how to get up to put the children to bed, and solved the difficulty at once by saying: ‘Well now I think you would like to get rid of us for a little while – we’ll stroll down and see the Peases’ – and he carried my husband off to see our neighbours.¹ Blessed tact! And on similar occasions he would insist on washing up after supper.

NOTE

1. ‘The Peases’ were the family of Edward Reynolds Pease (1857–1955), one of the founders of the Fabian Society, Secretary from 1890 to 1913 and author of *The History of the Fabian Society* (1916).