

# John Sadler

## the valet

**M**y name is John Sadler. I'm 35 years old and valet to Sir Archibald Carew, a rich London businessman.

It's my job to look after all of Sir Archibald's clothes, from his socks and underwear to his shirts and suits, his overcoats, hats, shoes and spats.

I suppose you could say I am like a mother to my master. I pour his baths, give him a shave, and help him to get dressed and undressed; I also pack and unpack his suitcases when he travels, either to his house in the country or his factories in the north of England.

Unlike some of the masters I have cared for since I became a valet 15 years ago, Sir Archibald is able to dress himself, though he does like his clothes to be carefully brushed and pressed, and his dressing room and study kept neat and clean.

He is what they call 'a self-made man', beginning work at the age of five, with his brothers and sisters, helping his parents make stockings at their tiny, one-up-one-down house. He worked hard, and went to Sunday school, where he learned to read and write, before starting his own business. Now he owns three or four factories in the North.

He doesn't like to be reminded about his humble beginnings – a bit like me.

I was brought up in the workhouse. I never knew my mum and dad; I think they died there. It was very bad, little food and hard work. I was found a place at a big house, as a boot boy, when I was nine or ten.

The hours were long – but it was easier than being in the house, where we were all half starved, like Mr Dickens' *Oliver Twist*.

I have it easy now after working my way up, through being a footman, to becoming a valet. I earn £35 a year – and all my food and keep. Sir Archibald even passes his old suits on to me, which I can either sell or wear.

I would say I was close to the master; well you have to be, looking after him like a baby. But I would not say we could ever be friends. I know my place. He is the master – and I am his servant. I stay in the background – a bit like the children – I'm 'seen but not heard'.

