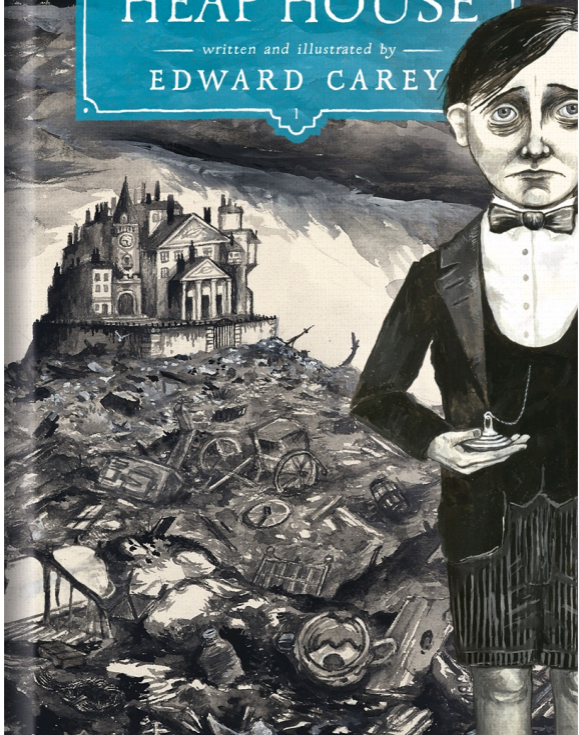


IREMONGER
HEAP HOUSE

— written and illustrated by —
EDWARD CAREY



'But how can an object speak, Clod?'

'I do not know, and I wish it wouldn't.'

'An object has no life, it has no mouth.'

'I know,' I said, 'and yet it persists.'

'I do not hear the forceps speaking.'

'No, but I do, I promise you, Uncle, a muffled, trapped voice, something locked away, saying, "Percy Hotchkiss."' "

Afterwards Aliver would often come to me and listen for a long time about all the different voices I heard, about all the different names, and he would make notes. It was just names that I heard, only ever names, some spoken in whispers, some in great shouts, some singing, some screaming, some sounded with modesty, some with great pride, some with miserable timidity. And always, to me, the names seemed to be

coming from different objects all about the great house. I could not concentrate in the school room because the cane kept calling out, 'William Stratton', and there was an inkwell that said, 'Hayley Burgess', and the globe was rumbling, 'Arnold Percival Lister.'

'Why are the names of the objects,' I asked Uncle Aliver one day, I was but seven or so at the time, 'these Johns and Jacks and Marys, these Smiths and Murphys and Joneses, why are they such odd names? So different from ours.'

'Well, Clod,' said Aliver, 'it is certain that we are the ones with the less usual names. And that it is a tradition of our family. We Iremongers have different monikers, because we are different from the rest of them. So that we may be told

apart from them. It is an old family custom, our names are like theirs that live away from here, beyond the heaplands, only slanted.'

'The people in London do you mean, Uncle?' I asked.

'In London and far away in all directions, Clod.'

'They have names like the ones I hear?'

'Yes, Clod.'

'Why do I hear the names, Uncle?'

'I do not know, Clod, it is something peculiar to you.'

'Shall it stop ever?'

'I cannot tell. It might go away, it might lessen, it may get worse. I do not know.'

Of all the names I heard, the one I heard most of all was James Henry

Hayward. That was because I always kept the object that said 'James Henry Hayward' with me wherever I went. It was a pleasant, young voice.

James Henry was a plug, a universal plug, it could fit most sink holes. I kept it in my pocket. James Henry was my birth object.

When each new Iremonger was born it was a family custom for them to be given something, a special object picked out by Grandmother. The Iremongers always judged an Iremonger by how he looked after his certain object, his birth object as they were called. We were to keep them with us at all times. Each was different. When I was born I was given James Henry Hayward. It was the first thing that ever I knew, my first toy and

companion. It had a chain with it, two feet long, at the end of the chain there was a small hook. When I could walk and dress myself, I wore my bath plug and chain as many another person might wear his fob watch. I kept my bath plug, my James Henry Hayward, out of sight so that it was safe, in my waistcoat pocket while the chain looped out U-shaped from the pocket and the hook was attached to my middle waistcoat button. I was very fortunate in the object I had, not all birth objects were so easy as mine.

While it was true my bath plug was a thing of no monetary value, such as Aunt Onjla's diamond tiepin (that said Henrietta Nysmith), it was in no way as cumbersome as Cousin Gustrid's skillet (Mr Gurney), or even my grandmother's