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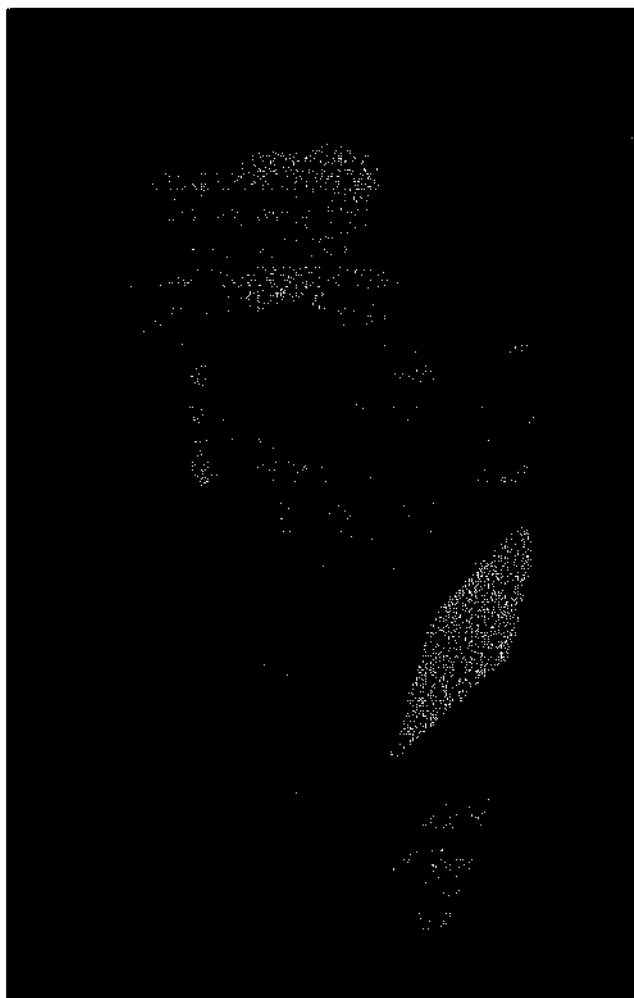
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**J. M. BARRIE**

*A Study in  
Fairies and Mortals*

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"CONSIDERATIONS ON EDMUND GOSSE."

**J. M. BARRIE**

*A Study in Fairies and Mortals*

BY

**PATRICK BRAYBROOKE**

*Author of*

*"G. K. Chesterton," "Some Thoughts on Hilaire Belloc,"*

*"Lord Morley, Writer and Thinker"*



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## *Author's Note*

**W**H regard to the future of Sir James Barrie and his Plays there are two suggestions I should like to make. The one is that he shall finish his " SHALL WE JOIN THE LADIES "? and the other is that " PETER PAN " shall be played by a man and not by a woman.

There is no character of Barrie's so essentially masculine as "PETER PAN," yet the part is played by actresses who are in every sense horribly and inevitably grown up.

PATRICK BRAYBRDOKE

*London, 1924*

*Dedication*

TO  
NEVILLE AND ALL THE BOYS AND GIRLS  
WHO BELIEVE IN FAIRIES

ALSO TO  
MARGERY CORY

.

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## *Chapter One*

### "WHAT EVERY WOMAN KNOWS"

**WE** do not read many lines of this play, before we discover that we are such a long way from England that we have no difficulty in realising that we are in Scotland. There are quite a number of ways of getting to Scotland, we can do it by setting out from King's Cross, we can do it by listening to the whirl of the pipes as they echo across the concert room, we can do it in no better way than by plunging into a play by Barrie. Because if we cannot see Scotland through Barrie, we shall never see it, and what is far more important we shall never see Barrie or at least not the essential part of him.

"What Every Woman Knows" takes us right into the very domestic heart of Scotland. We need only listen to a little of the stage directions, those directions that indicate even more than his plays, the remarkable grip Barrie has of the likely feelings of certain men and certain women under certain conditions. Here then is the background of the first act of "What Every Woman Knows."

## 10 " *What Every Woman Knows* "

" James Wylie is about to make a move on the dambrod and in the little Scotch room there is an awful silence befitting the occasion."

"You will find them thus any Saturday night (after family worship which sends the servant to bed)."

Is not this enough to tell us that we are in a Scotch family? No English playwright would be so unwise as to make the servant go to bed after prayers, because it is not the custom of one-servant houses in England to have prayers at night. The Englishman does not care to pray publicly after dinner, he prefers to pray publicly before breakfast on week-days and before lunch on Sundays.

So we suddenly discover that we have got to the room where is seated Miss Wylie who is before the end of the play going to let us know pretty convincingly " *What Every Woman Knows.*" She is not at all a charming person. And she is not above a Society Lie, though it is not with her a cultivated art. In a few words Barrie shows her character which is not quite sincere.

" It is not the room you would be shown into if you were calling socially on Miss Wylie. The drawing room for you, and Miss Wylie, in a coloured merino to receive you ; very likely she would exclaim ' This is a pleasant surprise ' though she has seen you coming up the avenue and has just had time to whip the dustcloths off the chair and

to warn Alick, David and James, that they had better not dare come in to you before they have put on a dickey. There is one very fine chair, but heavens, not for sitting on ; just to give the room a social standing in an emergency."

And in the first act the four, Alick, David, James and Maggie are chatting, about this, that and the other, about the use of education, about the new minister at Galashiels, about the fortunate or unfortunate lady who is to be his wife. Maggie suggests she is full of charm. Like a man almost instinctively Alick quite abruptly asks Maggie what is charm ? It is a truly masculine question, no sensible woman would ever ask a man what is charm ? Maggie answers in a delightfully inconsequent and artless manner.

*Maggie*

Oh, it's—it's a sort of bloom on a woman. If you have it you don't need to have anything else ; and if you don't have it, it doesn't much matter what else you have. Some women, the few, have charm for all; and most have charm for one. But some have charm for none.

It is a pathetic little speech. As we read it we seem to see across the road the lonely woman ambling along, as we read it we seem to see in the far distance the little cots that should be filled, as we read it we seem to see in the haze

the funeral procession and none but the priest and the bearers at the grave.

A little later on, in the first act, John Shand makes his appearance. He comes in the guise of a burglar but his motive for theft is an admirable one. It is that he shall read the books which, Barrie tells us, the Wylies never read. However he is caught in the act but is not at all disconcerted. Being a porter at times and a student at others at Glasgow University, Shand does not lose his presence of mind. On being interrogated as to the reason of his strange actions he merely has the impertinence to comment on the comfort of the Wylie's chair. Which is quite a good way of letting us know that John Shand is a young man who is not going to be a railway porter all his life.

A long conversation results in the Wylies<sup>1</sup> offering to lay out £300 on the education of Shand, provided he will marry Maggie, if she is so desirous, after a period of five years. Shand accepts the proposal and the first act conveniently comes to an end. James philosophing on the queer complexity of woman comes to the conclusion that it is quite time a book was written about them.

The idea of the reason of the Shand burglary with the motive of getting knowledge is strangely Chestertonian, reminding us of the cheerful person, keen enough on ethics, who saw no reason to imagine it was unmoral to rob his own house.

Thus, with the dramatic situation tending to become interesting, we enter upon the second

act. No play that has not aroused speculation and desire by the end of the first act is likely to be successful. In a book, people may be content to wait several chapters for the beginnings of the plot, but not in a play, if it is true enough (as the dramatic critics say almost weekly), that interest must be *sustained*, it is equally necessary that it shall be *generated* fairly early on in the first act.

With the opening of the second act we discover that Barrie, making full use of the dramatist's licence for skipping years has made us all six 3<sup>7</sup>ears older.

" John Shand's great hour has come. Perhaps his great hour really lies ahead of him, perhaps he had it six years ago ; it often passes us by in the night with such a faint call that we don't even turn in our beds."

It is because our great hour is so intimately connected with " peihaps " that we miss it, that we let it go as though it had never come, or we see it just disappearing round the bend in the road. Do we all get our great hours, do we really have them within our grasp, are they there though we see them not, are they there though we never feel their sweet breath, if they are and we perceive them not, then may we indeed feel melancholy, even bitter, for our great hour does not pass by again.

John Shand, the porter and university student, having profited to the full by his £300 has stood

for Parliament and we (privileged persons indeed) are in his committee rooms. It is as Banie says " snowing Shand to-night in Glasgow.<sup>1</sup>" Excitement is everywhere and Maggie is looking less attractive than usual imagining as unattractive women always do, that over dressing will make up for that which nature has forgotten to do.

John Shand in these six years has undergone a complete change, so far that in the place of his porter's garb he has donned a " five guinea suit/" The suspense of weeks even months is at last over and John Shand has aspired to the position of a Member of Parliament ; the admission of an ex-porter to the House is a terrible blow for the snobs.

It is at this period that we are introduced to Lady Sybil Tenderden and the Countess de la Briere. The main thing is that Lady Sybil considers John Shand is vulgar and to a large extent she is right. Self-made men are always a little vulgar as they are never quite at their ease, they are always too careful so that they shall not be found out of having been terribly nearly connected with selling over a counter instead of selling behind a door marked in very large letters " PRIVATE." Lady Sybil is not at all the sort of girl to fall in love; Barrie knows well enough that the process would be much too energetic for her well-bred modesty.

On the question of love, Barrie with his dialogue half cynical, half serious, between the Countess and Lady Sybil puts the position delightfully. We must not forget that they are

still in Shand's committee room and the new M.P. is ranting to the multitudes just outside,

*Comtesse* : "Ever been in love, you cold thing ? "

*Sybil* (yawning) : "I have never shot up in flame, Auntie."

*Comtesse* : "Think you could manage it ? "

*Sybil*: "If Mr. Right came along."

*Comtesse* : "As a girl of to-day it would be your duty to tame him."

*Sybil* : "As a girl of to-day I would try to do my duty."

*Comtesse* : "And if it turned out that *he* tamed you instead ? "

*Sybil*: "He would have to do that if he were *my* Mr. Right."

*Comtesse* : "And then ? "

*Sybil*: "Then, of course I should adore him. Auntie, I think if I ever really love it will be like Mary Queen of Scots, who said of her Bothwell that she could follow him round the world in her nighty."

So with Shand getting a firmer grip on the affections of his constituents and successfully snubbing Lady Sybil and the Comtesse, we arrive at the end of act two with Maggie pledged to be Mrs. John Shand very shortly, addressing the constituents as " My Constituents." Maggie is beginning to know at least half of " What Every Woman Knows" and she is beginning to consider pretty strongly the other half.

It is not nearly such a long step from the second act to the third as from the first act to the second. We are not surprised to find John Shand comfortably established in his comfortably furnished London house, the sort of house that all politicians have, situated not too near Westminster and not too far away from it. And even Maggie has improved, at least in the matter of dress, we find her entertaining the Comtesse on the one hand and thinking about that " half finished " stocking.

Rather unnecessarily Barrie introduces Venables in this act, or perhaps to be more correct it was not quite necessary for him to have made the Comtesse a former lover of the Cabinet Minister. However it gives us the opportunity to discover that John's speeches are not entirely his own. It is here that we come to the rather conventional part of the play. As we quite expected Shand has fallen horribly, irretrievably in love with Lady Sybil, notwithstanding that that Lady had described him as a "boor."<sup>11</sup> John has got it about as badly as possible, Barrie has quite a lot of sympathy for his porter politician.

" We may be almost fond of John for being so worshipful of love. Much has come to him that we had almost despaired of his acquiring, including nearly all the divine attributes except that sense of humour."

With the rather conventional falling in love with the Sybil episode reached, Barrie gets us to

the end of the third act once again desperately interested for he conceives a situation that is both unique and delicate. It is a master stroke showing how a genius manages to add an original finish to a rather commonplace situation. Incidentally it brings out the fact that Maggie is a very clever little person and no small judge of character, especially when that character is a vacillating husband.

Maggie arranges that John and Lady Sybil shall both be the guests of the Comtesse at her country cottage at the same time, for after all what really matters except that John's speech shall be of the best, and with Sybil to help how can it fail to be so ? John and Sybil fall in with the plan and we arrive at the end of act three marvelling at the cleverness of Maggie, but vaguely wondering if she is not going to be *too* clever. That she has had a pretty nasty shock by the whole thing is quite evident because Barrie tells us that " for a time she is done with knitting," and if Maggie is no longer wishful to knit, then she must be very upset.

Act four and we are down at the Comtesse's cottage where are Sybil and John. Fortunately John discovers that Sybil is not such an inspiration as he thought, Maggie arrives, and puts the whole position to rights. It doesn't take long for the two lovers to discover that their love isn't very lasting, it is in fact so temporary that Lady Sybil retires somewhat hastily, and John is ungallant enough to remark " By God, it's more than I deserve."

Barrie has too had quite enough of the beautiful superficial Sybil for he tells us " Sybil runs away ; and in the fulness of time she married successfully in Cloth of Silver, which was afterwards turned into a bed-spread." John is now very near salvation, with Maggie's help he has got his speech just what it should be, with her help he has got rid of Lady Sybil, one thing he lacks he still can't laugh. But last scene of all Maggie even makes him do that. It is a terrible struggle, well enough does Barrie know that laughter is of the gods, if you haven't got it at birth, it isn't going to be easy to learn the art.

*Maggie* (last line) : Laugh, John, laugh. Watch me ; see how easy it is.

" A terrible struggle is taking place within him. He creaks. Something that may be mirth forces a passage, at first painfully no more in it than in the discoloured water from a spring that has long been dry. Soon, however he laughs loud and long. The spring water is becoming clear. Maggie claps her hands. He is saved."

" *What Every Woman Knows* " is obviously both a serious play and a satirical comedy. It illustrates that men are always fools and women are always wise, at least women like Maggie.

John Shand is typical of the man who rises, the man who falls in love with a woman not so much because she has a pretty face, as because she has a title or lives in Mayfair. He is typical

of the man who uses every means at hand to help himself, and entirely ignores the most useful helper dose at hand. Maggie is full of that queer feminine quality charm, principally because she does not think she possesses any. The charming people are those who think they are devoid of it, charm to be such must not be apparent to the possessor of it. Barrie makes it quite clear that Maggie is a clever woman though she has probably never heard of Plato or Aristotle.

The whole theme of the play is of course that the successful man owes everything to a woman, yet Barrie makes no secret that the successful man may easily lose everything because of a woman. Had Shand cast in his lot entirely with Lady Sybil it is pretty certain that he would have been ruined. Whether John in real life would have been likely to fall in love with a woman of the type of Lady Sybil is possibly not really important, that he does so is of course necessary to the play. Whether Maggie would have executed such a clever piece of strategy as sending the two lovers to tire of each other in the same cottage is I think a little improbable, but on the other hand we must not forget that Barrie tells us that Maggie has been improving for a number of years even that she dresses with better taste. And once a woman will see that improvement in her dress is desirable, we need never be surprised if she becomes such a genius that she devises a plan to make her husband tire of his lover.

Though in certain details Barrie rather draws

20        " *What Every Woman Knows* "

on the imagination, though at times the play tends to become rather conventional, the general lessons of the power of woman and man's dependence upon her are brought out with astonishing skill. " *What Every Woman Knows* " is that every woman has in her hands the making or marring of men, perhaps Barrie wrote the play to warn them that this power must not be misused, that it is something Holy, something that makes men pause and remember that once long ago they learnt the glory of Womanhood when they knelt at their mother's knees.

## Chapter Two

### QUALITY STREET

**T**HERE is little doubt that modern life is essentially vulgar. We have none of the refinement of a hundred years ago. If we travel it is no longer by the picturesque stage coach, it is *by* a hideous monstrosity that we call a luxurious motor-car. Or if we are more closely allied to the common herd, we travel not by the rather pretty horse bus, but emulating moles we travel underground and obtain thereby manners of the worm. For amusements, night clubs, painted women, an artificial attempt to pretend we are callous, don't care, is our role.

It would be of course ridiculous to say that all the picturesque has passed out of modern life, we can still love the sweet notes of the horn, we can still delight in the sight of the pink coats ascending the hill, we can still wonder silently as a great ship slides down from the docks and creeps silently out to sea. But we have very largely lost the air of "genteelness" of a hundred years ago, our girls speak in crude slang, they have none of the pretty reticence we expect them to have, our literature and the theatre suffer from too much sex.

Barrie in "Quality Street" takes us back a full hundred years. The atmosphere is so different from to-day, that we can scarcely conceive that it ever existed.

We find ourselves in a small country town, the type of town that exists all over England, all so much the same that the name is the only thing that convinces us they are really not all the same place. In this dear old town SD far from the highroads of life there is the most respectable of all the respectable streets in it, one Quality Street. And evidently the inhabitants of Quality Street are a very happy set of people for Barrie tells us "there is a satisfaction about living in Quality Street which even religion cannot give."

It is in a smallish house in this street that we find the delightful ladies about whom this play is written. We may as well let Barrie describe the setting in which we find them, we need only add that, make no mistake, we are going to love these ladies very much before we leave them.

"The scene is the blue and white room in the house of the Misses Susan and Phoebe Throssel in Quality Street. Through the bowed window at the back we have a glimpse of the street. It is pleasantly broad and grass grown and is linked to the outer world by one demure shop, whose door rings a bell every time it opens and shuts. This bell is the most familiar sound of Quality Street." It is in the time of the Napoleonic Wars and

though the good ladies of Quality Street are no doubt busy knitting, the street is not without animation. Now and again ladies pass in their pattens, a maid perhaps protecting them with an umbrella, for flakes of snow are falling discreetly. Gentlemen in the street are an event ; but, see, just as we raise the curtain, there goes the recruiting sergeant to remind us that we are in the period of the Napoleonic Wars. If he were to look in at the window of the blue and white room all the ladies there assembled would draw themselves up ; they know him for a rude fellow who smiles at the approach of maiden ladies and continues to smile after they have passed."

It is indeed evident then that the ladies in the blue and white room are models of propriety, but oh they have such kind hearts. Who, if Barrie does not know how, can picture a whimsical lady with a kind heart ? Let us look more closely at the occupants of the charming little room, the little sort of room that makes us cry, not because we really know it, but because so many long years ago we knew a room just like it, and the occupants, why, we wonder, cannot they tell us where they are, why did that coffin take them away, why is it we can't bear even to think of that little room ?

" The room is one seldom profaned by the foot of man, and everything in it is white or blue. Miss Phoebe is not present, but

here are Miss Susan, Miss Willoughby and her sister Miss Fanny, and Miss Henrietta Turnbull. There seems no sufficient reason why we should choose Miss Phoebe as our heroine rather than any of the others, except, perhaps that we like her name best."

**In** the first act we find these four ladies chatting and knitting. Their conversation is quite conventional until one of them suddenly discovers, no doubt through intuition, that there appears to be a man in the house. It turns out to be no other than the bold sergeant who winks at unescorted females and evni smiles. From him they discover that a gentleman has enlisted. Phoebe appears at this stage to be extremely happy, for has not Mr. Brown made it quite evident that he is more than just interested in her? And after all we are not surprised to find that the talk turns to wedding gowns. Miss Susan has a wedding gift for Phoebe. Barrie writes of the offering of it with understanding of a woman's mind that few men have and fewer women. In a few lines Barrie shows us what a woman really is, while the clever woman writer compiling book after book on the subject only leaves us convinced that woman cannot be contained in a book. Barrie says—

*Miss Susan* (softly) : " Phoebe, I have a wedding gift for you.

*Phoebe* : " Not yet ? "

*Miss Susan* : "It has been ready for a long time. I began it when you were not ten

years old and I was a young woman. I meant it for myself, Phoebe. I had hoped that he—his name was William—but I think I must have been too unattractive, my love.

*Phoebe* : " Sweetest, dearest—"

*Miss Susan* : " I always associate it with a sprigged poplin I was wearing that summer, with a breadth of coloured silk in it, being a naval officer ; but something happened, a Miss Cicely Pemberton, and they are quite big boys now. So long ago—Phoebe—he was very tall with brown hair—it was most foolish of me, but I was always so fond of sewing—with long straight legs and such a pleasant expression."

*Phoebe* : " Susan, what was it ? "

*Miss Susan* : " It was a wedding gown my dear. Even plain women, Phoebe, we can't help it ; when we are young we have romantic ideas just as if we were pretty. And so the wedding gown was never used. Long before it was finished I knew he would not offer, but I finished it and then I put it away, I have always hidden it from you, Phoebe, but of late I have brought it out again and altered it.<sup>IF</sup>"

So we are introduced to Captain Valentine Brown if we may be permitted to give him a military title before he possesses one. He has something he must tell them. Phoebe guesses shrewdly what it is. The others are waiting to congratulate her ; when we get a Barrie

surprise. The news is that Captain Brown has enlisted and is off to the wars. It is a terrible blow to Phoebe. She doesn't say much but enough for us to know once again how Barrie knows when the great moment of a woman's life just doesn't come.

*Phoebe* : " A misunderstanding ; just a mistake."

So almost at once we come to the end of the first act " and we do not see the sisters again for ten years.<sup>11</sup>

. . . . .

When we again see the sisters we have aged terribly. In the distance ten years seems such a long time, we think it will never come to an end, yet on looking back the time has passed almost without our perceiving its passage. Ten years on, what a lot we are going to do, we shall be so different, we shall hardly know that the person is really ourself ; ten years and we look back to discover that we are much the same, only so much older, the hair that was flaxen turning to a grey, the eyes that shone, just a little leaden, the chair by the fireside has become more attractive than the gaily lighted streets and the flaming theatres,

Ten years and Phoebe has aged really dreadfully, for not only is she ten years older, she is also no longer Phoebe " of the ringlets " but a dour schoolmistress worried with the everlasting business of making her scholars delighted that

X equals Y or that A multiplied by A is not  $2a$  but A squared. And then suddenly we see our tragedy that is distressing Phoebe " she looks not ten years older, but twenty and not an easy twenty."

It is in this act that Barrie gives us an indication of that mysticism that seems to invade so much of his writings. There is no need to go at all fully into the remainder of *Quality Street* beyond the question of Miss Livvy. Captain Brown returns from the wars and is naturally disappointed to find that his Phoebe has aged so considerably. He tries not to show the shock her appearance is to him but does not succeed. Phoebe devises upon a novel scheme. She introduces a niece, one Miss Livvy, who is in reality none other than Phoebe herself, dressed to look younger. In this garb Phoebe introduces herself to the evidently extremely short-sighted gallant captain. He is completely taken in and thinks that if the Aunt has grown old, well at least in Miss Livvy she has a most attractive niece, so attractive that by the end of the act he has persuaded Miss Susan and Miss Livvy to accompany him to the ball.

In act three we are the spectators of the brilliance of the ball, Miss Livvy carries all before her. She is the envy of all the girls in the room. Are not her ringlets excellent, are not her manners just coquettish enough, is not she the type of girl for war weary soldiers to feast their eyes upon? All goes merrily until towards the end of the act when the Captain and Miss Livvy

engage in a tete-à-tete. Very soon Miss Livvy discovers that the gay flirt of the ballroom is not the woman for whom the Church Bells ring.

In fact Miss Livvy discovers very quickly that Captain Brown does not approve of her at all.

*Valentine* : " Ah, but believe me, Miss Livvy, it is not the flaunting flower men love; it is the modest violet."

But Miss Livvy soon enough discovers that the person the Captain really loves is Phoebe, yet she cannot think that such a brave and distinguished soldier can any longer love a rather worn-out disgruntled schoolmistress. But he do PS.

*Valentine* : " I have discovered for myself that the schoolmistress in her old maid's cap is the noblest Miss Phoebe of all. When I enlisted I compared her to a garden. I have often thought of that."

*Phoebe* : " Tis an old garden now."

*Valentine* : " The paths, ma'am, are better shaded."

*Phoebe* : " The flowers have grown old-fashioned."

*Valentine* : " They smell the sweeter."

The act ends with Valentine heartily sick of Miss Livvy, murmuring the hope that he will never see her again, while Phoebe continues to repeat the wonderful words " He loves me, he loves me."

In the last act we have the nature of a reconstruction. We are still in the blue and white room but the occupants have aged a great deal. Especially Phoebe ; the strain of being Miss Livvy, delightful though it has been, has been a harassing affair.

" She now turns guiltily from the sun that used to be her intimate, her face is drawn, her form condensed into the smallest space, and her hands lie trembling in her lap."

Miss Livvy has gone for ever, she has played her part well enough and she can retire gracefully. A good deal of skilful word play is indulged in, so that the inquisitive neighbours shall not learn of the deception of Phoebe. The gallant captain pretends to carry " something " into a cab (we are sure all the windows in Quality Street have peeping eyes), and we have said our last farewell to the impertinent and impudent Miss Livvy. So Phoebe gets what she wants, which is that in the future she shall be Mrs Phoebe Brown. She capitulates with ample dignity, the offer by the noble captain is accepted thus.

*Phoebe* : " Sir, the dictates of my heart enjoin me to accept your too flattering offer."<sup>11</sup>

. . . . .

It is almost impossible to imagine Barrie in more delightful mood than in *Quality Street*. There is of course nothing whatever of the

dramatic in the play. If there is one word that could describe the essence of it, it is that the play is based on a most understanding comprehension of *humanity*. In Phoebe we have Barrie as the delineator of the whims of a woman at his best.

Phoebe to a certain extent is a symbol. She is the symbol of the woman who cannot bear to grow old, who cannot bear to realise that she may not any more expect tender glances and soft words from the other sex. Yet she is not in any sense an unpleasant type of woman. Many women wish to keep young merely to be the centre of admiration, Phoebe wishes to remain young because she has never really had the pleasures for which every real woman craves.

It is because of this wish to remain young that Barrie, using a general principle, invents a particular example.

Miss Livvy is an uncanny person, she exists, yet she does not exist. She is that shadowy form we see when we gaze into the fire, she is that shadowy shape that ever and ever invades us when we least expect it, she is that haunting memory that grips us when we look at a photo, perhaps twenty years old. Miss Livvy is the spirit of the desire to regain our lost youth. Phoebe wishing to be young, wishing to delight the Captain once more, is enjoined to attempt to become young again by a harmless and really pathetic deception. Yet there is a far deeper lesson in *Quality Street*, in fact it demonstrates very clearly part of the Barrie outlook

upon life. It is quite frankly, that it is little use attempting to be what you are not. It is no good for the woman of forty to behave as though she were twenty-five, it is no crime to regret the passing of youth, but it is futile to attempt to get it back. As Miss Livvy ; Phoebe is a failure, she merely annoys the Captain, who disgusted goes back to his first love. That in this respect the plan succeeded is not I think the great point of *Barrie* in his *Quality Street*. It is rather the utter futility of attempting to regain that which is for good or ill gone beyond recall. We may indulge in dreams of the recovery of lost youth, but they can never become more than dreams. The wise man and wise woman realise this.

Whether of course Phoebe could have passed as Miss Livvy is very doubtful. She gives no signs of any particular histrionic powers. On the other hand, Captain Valentine Brown appears to be of not the highest perception and ten years at the war might well have blunted his rather limited intelligence. Military men, whether in peace or war, are not apt to think sometimes much beyond the nearness of a tantalising curl or an engaging ankle. The question of Realism in *Quality Street* is certainly rather far fetched, it is the symbolic skill displayed that makes us so admire the play.

When all is said and done the inhabitants of the blue and white room in *Quality Street* can make us cry ; not because we are really sad, but because we are human, because we have

been J'oung, because we understand the pathos of Miss Livvy, because we see under her eye-lashes the wrinkles she can't quite destroy, because we too have compared people to a garden, people who have grown old and like the flowers have gone to sleep with the coming of the night. Perhaps it is the purity of Quality Street that makes the play so infinitely attractive, there is nothing sordid in the motives of the characters.

There are few of us who have not walked down some Quality Street, there are few of us who have not supped in a little blue and white room, while one knitted and the other read, there are few of us who have not met the bold brave sergeant with the mischievous eye.

Quality Street is a play about delightful people, it is intensely true to life. We may be very hard-hearted people, we may watch a stage murder with cool indifference, we may merely laugh at the horrible fate of the hero and heroine in the hands of the villain, we may be irritated with the cynicism of Mayfair and Lancaster Gate, but if we start down Quality Street with Barrie, we shall not be ashamed if we weep in spite of our very strong wills.

## Chapter Three

### THREE SHORTER PLAYS

(a)

#### *The Twelve Pound Look*

PROBABLY this play is one of the most popular of Barrie's shorter plays. A short play is one of the most difficult things in the world to succeed with. If the play is not of interest in the first few lines, there is hardly time to work up to a success. On the other hand ; in a long play, the second act may redeem a poor first one, though of course it is always better for a play to be interesting from the very first entrance. Apart from the fact that early interest is necessary for the success of a play, there is another infallible test. If we can *read* a play and read it with enjoyment then there is no need to worry about the possible failure of it when it is acted. Barrie's plays are always intensely readable,/.ami perhaps *The Twelve Pound Look* is among those that are most readable. We will let Barrie introduce us to the place of the play, for who can do it better than he ?

<sup>11</sup> If quite convenient (as they say about cheques) you are to conceive that the scene is laid in your own house and that Harry Sims is you.'

We have no particular objection about the house, but we are not so sure we want to be Harry Sims, accommodating as Barrie is, in wishing our very good selves to be Sims.

" It pleases us to make him a city man, but (rather than lose you) he can be turned with a scrape of the pen into a K.C., fashionable doctor, Secretary of State, or what you will. It is that day in your career when everything went wrong just when everything seemed to be superlatively right. She came to him in his great hour and told him she did not admire him."

So that now we know what the story is about, we may as well get along with the telling of it.

When the play opens we find that Harry Sims has attained to the eminence of being about to receive a knighthood. He and his wife are rehearsing the ceremony so that there shall be no hitch in that sacred moment when upon bended knee, Sims shall receive from his majesty the honour of being Sir Harry Sims, It is at this precise moment that a typist is announced demanding to see Sims. She is interviewed at first by Lady Sims, a soulless sort of person, well fitted to be the wife of such an eminent husband.

The typist whose name is Kate is a self-reliant sort of person, whose income is regulated by the number of typewritten words she types. When, in a few minutes Sir Harry comes in to give her instructions, we learn, that his mouth opens wide and the two stare at each other. For it very soon comes out that this self-possessed young typist is none other than the divorced wife of Sir Harry.

A nice little conversation is engaged upon. Sir Harry is disgusted to find that his former wife has sank so low as a typist, it is to him the depth of degradation. For of course what is a typist to a successful business man? Merely a human machine to be dictated to and then forgotten. Naturally what Sir Harry wants to know is why Kate ran away, why she left her home of luxury, why she never came back. And of course the answer up to a point is what we should expect. It was because of a man. Sir Harry is determined to find out who it was. And here is Barrie with a nice little surprise for us who of course thought it must be Sir Harry's best friend.

As it happens though it was simply no one at all. Kate it appears, was such a spirited young lady that she determined to run away. But first she must prove that she could earn her own living. After six months we discover that Kate had been able to earn twelve pounds! Sir Harry is naturally annoyed.

*Sir Harry* : " You have spoilt the day for me,"

The play ends with Lady Sims asking Sir Harry an unpleasant question.

*Lady Sims* : " Are they very expensive ? "

*Sir Harry* : " What ? "

*Lady Sims* : " Those machines ? "

Barrie in this play is dealing with a typical successful business man. Sir Harry is the type of man we can see any morning on any suburban station. We can see him strolling down the platform, almost brushing the humble clerks and typists on to the line. At home we can see his wife, merely a pawn, a chattel, the unimportant person who entertains and does nothing else. Once more Barrie gives us the picture of the type of woman who prefers to earn her own living with a typewriter to eating out of her successful husband's golden spoons. Barrie is not sneering at Sir Harry, he knows his typo is inevitably will be while men measure success by gold and knighthoods. As a typist ; of course Kate is of no importance, she is merely one of thousands who nightly fight to enter the tube which will carry them to the station nearest their lodgings or their small villa home. But that Kate could spoil Sir Harry's morning shows that even an unimportant typist can make a callous city magnate wince. That she happened to be his wife has nothing to do with it. Successful men like to be praised by unimportant people, the city magnate may scoff at the typist who writes his letters, but he does not like to feel she does

not admire him. It is a human weakness that we like to be admired by those we so fallaciously look upon as inferior. Barrie shows once again how the successful man does so often fail to be the successful husband, not through malice but through thoughtlessness.

For Sir Harry is not malicious, he merely put his own success before everything else and the meeting with his former wife, who does not admire him, gives him a bad hour or two and probably teaches him a lesson. Though it must be said that apparently Barrie thinks that the incident will have no permanent effect upon Sims. Here we think his psychology is at fault.

(b)

*Rosalind*

It is a very remarkable thing how fond we really are of our own job, especially when we come to the moment when it is time to leave it finally. The soldier long retired and living in some odious seaside resort never ceasing to regret that he is no longer the shivering excited subaltern standing on Southampton Docks, a last farewell before the transport takes him for long years to India ; the bank clerk sad and gloomy the last day that he makes his way in the familiar train to his villa home in the suburbs ; the engine driver quite silent the

last time he takes his train to the far, far, North. However much we may grumble at our work when we have it, contemplation of being without it is a melancholy thought.

It is this theme of the magnetism of our work that Barrie works out in *Rosalind*. But we must first of all describe the action of the play, and then consider the possible meanings of it.

As usual Barrie writes an entrancing description of the setting, it is in his own inimitable way of giving stage directions. We find ourselves in a cottage by the sea, far from the horrid rush of civilisation, far from the hateful rush for commerce, far from the crudities of great cities, far from the glamour and artificiality of smart houses and smart people.

" Two middle-aged ladies are drinking tea in the parlour of a cottage by the sea. It is far from London, and a hundred yards from the cry of children, of whom middle-aged ladies have often had enough. Were the room Mrs. Page's we should make a journey through it in search of character but she is only a bird of passage ; nothing of herself here that has not strayed from her bedroom except some cushions and rugs ; touches of character after all maybe, for they suggest that Mrs. Page likes to sit soft.'<sup>1</sup>

So we find Mrs. Page taking tea with her landlady and discussing middle age, Just as we are getting really a little tired of the conversation, there is a knock at the door. For once Barrie

nearly leaves the coming of the "knock" too long.

At this moment Barrie introduces a public schoolboy ; clearly a type. He tells us how very much he is the expected product of the average public school. For undoubtedly public schools do turn out masses of men who have precisely the same outlook on life.

"Before Mrs. Quickly has reached the door it opens to admit an impatient young man in knickerbockers and a Norfolk jacket, all aglow with raindrops. Public school (and the particular one) is written on his forehead, and almost nothing else ; he has scarcely yet begun to surmise that anything else may be required. Having lately left Oxford he is facing the world confidently with nothing to impress it. He has not decided whether to drop into business or diplomacy or the bar."

The fact is having to wait for a train, Roche (this is his surname) begs leave to rest in the cottage for a while. There is some rather unnecessary and stupid by-play and we find Roche and Mrs. Page in full and eloquent conversation. The chatter turns on Mrs. Page's daughter, who turns out to be the person, who at the moment, has hooked Roche pretty effectually. There then happens the only thing that saves this play from being ridiculous, it is that Roche discovers Mrs. Page has no actress daughter, in fact has no daughter at all ; she is simply Mrs. Page on the

stage. Mrs. Page and the daughter are one. Roche of course takes it pretty badly and gallantly says in spite of her middle age, it was Mrs. Page all along he loved and will marry her. Fortunately a telegram recalls Mrs. Page once more into being Beatrice Page, and back she goes to the boards, declaring that the only thing that is not real is middle age. And Roche we are left to imagine later marries a nice girl, with a nice income, and a nice mother, and we suppose they have nice children. However we hope the young ass learns that actresses are better left alone and usually look better from the stalls than at the stage door.

Barrie in this play of course shows that the lure of the stage is ever present, once its fascination has gripped. ' Mrs. Page is an absurd creation, quite unreal and wholly detestable. Roche is a public school ass who would probably have been less of an ass, had his parents kept him from the near proximity of a clerical headmaster and the " tone," of a public school.

It is really on the whole a very poor and impossible play. That there are many clever lines in it goes without saying. But Barrie has attempted a satire of a double personality, with but scant success. Mrs. Page would have not been in the least likely to have taken Roche in so completely, and she would not have been able so easily first to be the mother and then the " daughter,"<sup>1</sup> Except for the brilliance of the dialogue, the play is a tedious farce quite unworthy of the genius of Barrie.

(c)

*The Will*

There is undoubtedly an underlying cynicism in this play, and it is no doubt that the oft used expression " money doesn't bring happiness " is a truism. For the cynicism of the play lies in the fact that Barrie shows really that a state of having a moderate income is better than a huge fortune, whereas nine out of ten people would consider the contradictory to this, much more true.

The scene of the play lies in the office of a lawyer and the first scene amusing enough, concerns the making of a will by a very young couple, and naturally the young bride, with the usual unreasoning of young brides, thinks that the making of his will, is as good as a death sentence for her husband. In this scene, quite away from the main thread of the story, Barrie introduces a really pathetic incident. So few incidents on the stage are really pathetic, but Barrie always has a way of suddenly showing us that the pathetic things in life, are those which come in the ordinary course of life. The incident in particular is a conversation between Mr. Devizes the lawyer, and his clerk Surtees. It is a conversation between the two, when Surtees has been made certain, by a specialist, that he has an incurable disease. It shall be quoted, as the passage brings out admirably

the Barrie genius for understanding the relations between master and man.

*Mr. Devizes* : " You don't look very gay. Surtees."

*Surtees* : " I'm sorry, sir. We can't all be gay. I'll see to this, sir."

*Mr. Devizes* : " Stop a minute. Is there anything wrong ? Not worrying over that matter we spoke about ? Is the pain worse ? "

*Surtees* : " It's no great pain, sir."

*Mr. Devizes* : " I'm sure it's not—what you fear. Any specialist would tell you so."

*Surtees* : " I have been to one—sir—yesterday."

*Mr. Devizes* : " Well ? "

*Surtees* : " It's that sir."

*Mr. Devizes* : " He couldn't be sure."

*Surtees* : " Yes, sir."

The second scene finds us, as is the wont with Barrie, very much older, gray-haired, a bit cynical, no longer believing in fairies. Still in the lawyer's office we are spectators of the scene when the happy married couple we saw making a will in the first, in view of their great wealth make an amended one. It is interesting enough to see how success has spoilt Emily Ross, turned her into a fur-coated suburban snob from a nice unassuming villa housewife. And she was so much nicer, as much nicer as the people who live in the poorer streets of our

suburbs are nicer than those who live in the mansions.

Scene three, much later on again and still in the lawyer's office. Evidently lawyers live for ever, probably they don't like the idea of dying. And now Philip Ross, a miserable widower, knows not what to do with his vast wealth. So the curtain showing us that in the case of Philip Ross more money has meant less happiness.

Barrie in *The Will* writes of the *Psychology of Money*, if we may suggest a new cult. Though far from the level of Barrie's best plays, *The Will* is distinctly clever and has its lesson, especially for the type of education given by our commercial colleges, whose aim is money and nothing else of any value.

Barrie does not excel as a writer of short plays. He has not time to work out his ingenious themes with the detail they require. *Rosalind* is much too much in the nature of an elaborate revue "turn."<sup>1</sup> The characters are not pleasing or interesting and Barrie cannot seem to make up his mind whether Mrs. Page is more likely to be middle aged or more likely to look really like her daughter.

I  
The *Twelve Pound Look* is of course the best short play Barrie has written. This is largely because he brings out the character of an enterprising young woman. For who does not know, that given a pretty face, a disarming manner and a sound typewriter, a young woman can get on so well, that she has no need to get

a divorce from her husband, by the usual methods. Barrie seems to infer that the average woman, would prefer to be a typist, than be the wife of a dull but very successful business man, with one eye on a knighthood and the other eye (when not in use, for anything more important) for his wife. Barrie is delightfully chivalrous in such an estimation, but he is also delightfully wrong, for the very simple reason, that women like Kate are few and far between,

With *The Will* I have already said what it meant. It is only necessary to add that it certainly was not meant to show that lawyers live to a good old age, as was suggested not long ago, by a very eminent critic, who ought to have known better.

## Chapter Four

### THE ADMIRABLE CRICHTON

ONE of the most difficult questions that confronts social reformers is that of the distinction of class. The problem is chiefly difficult because those who wish to solve it set about their attempt in the wrong fashion. Let it be said at once that any attempt to make out that there is no such thing as class distinction is doomed to failure. It is as foolish as saying that a racehorse because it is a horse, is the same as a carthorse, because that is a horse. Practice is only necessary to disprove such a fallacious theory. The socialist fails because he tries to make all men equal, the tyrant fails because he exaggerates the difference between man and man. Nothing is more foolish than the doctrine of equality, it is disproved at birth, it remains unproved at death. Those who attempt the doctrine of equality usually assume a patronising manner, which entirely convinces, those whom they wish to be thought as equal, that they are in every sense really considered unequal. For were men really equal, there would be no reason

to devise artificial means to make them so. What society needs to learn and to learn more than it needs to learn the Lord's Prayer, is that certain classes have certain rights, that all rights are not for all classes.

Teach a public school boy that he is equal to his headmaster and he will no longer remain a schoolboy, teach a dustman that he is equal to an archbishop and he will make a poor dustman. The dustman has his rights, the archbishop has his, but they are not the same rights.

One of the most terrible mistakes of all the terrible mistakes made by teachers of Christianity has been the suggestion that all men are equal. If they *are* all equal, how is it that the Founder of that curiously misinterpreted creed, talked pleasantly about those who were first being last and those last first. The doctrine of the equality of man, is as fallacious as it is mischievous, it raises false hopes, it makes men dissatisfied with their place in life, it deludes with false hopes, it produces a race of patronising persons, -bishops at one end and zealous ladies at the other and it tries to make men equal and by its very efforts presupposes them unequal.

At the end of this chapter it will appear quite reasonable that this digression should have been entered upon, in spite of the fact that the chapter is a study of Barrie and his play *The Admirable Crichton*. Let us then, having sounded in no uncertain tones, the prelude ; ring up the curtain and transport ourselves to

The delightful house of Lord Loam, in that exclusive but singularly attractive little community that lives in Mayfair and cannot imagine life possible on the other side of the Park.

; As we are going to talk so much about Crichton in this play it is as well that we should see at once what sort of person Barrie conceives him to be, one thing Crichton is very proud of is his position as a butler.

" To be an indoor servant at all is to Crichton a badge of honour; to be a butler at thirty is the realisation of his proudest ambitions. He is devotedly attached to his master, who, in his opinion, has but one fault, he is not sufficiently contemptuous of his inferiors,"<sup>1</sup>

Quite enough to show us that at present Barrie is telling us about a very orthodox butler.

In the first act Lord Loam and his daughters are busy entertaining the servants. This we are told is on account of the Radical tendencies of his Lordship. Of course the only people who really dislike the entertainment are the servants. In this act we make the acquaintance of Ernest Woolley, he is an Honourable and makes quite good epigrams, Lord Loam's three daughters are typical products of Mayfair, rather brainless, fairly good-natured and quite impossible to find more than a mile from Berkeley Square.

When we make their acquaintance, Lady

Mary has just become engaged to Lord Brocklehurst, the sort of young man that has made Piccadilly what it is, the Mecca of young men who have just sufficient brains to walk along it without thinking why they do so.

Crichton of course doesn't approve at all of this servant's party, it had on a former occasion a result extremely shattering to his dignity. He tells Lady Mary why this is so.

*Lord Loam* : " Very delighted to see you, Crichton. Mary, you know Mr. Crichton,

*Lady Mary* : " Milk and sugar, Crichton ?"

*Crichton* : " I'm ashamed to be seen talking to you, my lady."

*Lady Mary* : "To such a perfect servant as you all this must be most distasteful. (Crichton is too respectful to answer). Oh, please to speak, or I shall have to recite. You do hate it, don't you ? "

*Crichton* : "It pains me, your ladyship. It disturbs the etiquette of the servant's hall. After last month's meeting the page-boy, in a burst of equality, called me Crichton. He was dismissed."

So philosophising further, Crichton discusses equality with Lady Mary and Lord Loam. Crichton's ideas are so sensible, so eminently " Barrieish ", so needed to be learnt by well meaning maniacs that they shall be quoted, they show so well how equality is viewed by those who dwell much nearer the kitchen stove than those in the drawing room.

*Crichton* (still talking to Lady Mary) :  
" No, my lady ; his lordship may compel us to be equal upstairs, but there will never be equality in the servant's hall."

*Lord Loam* (overhearing this) : " What's that ? No equality ? Can't you see *Crichton*, that our divisions into classes are artificial, that if we were to return to Nature, which is the aspiration of my life, all would be equal ? "

*Crichton* : " If I may make so bold as to contradict your Lordship—"

*Lord Loam* : "Go on."

*Crichton* : " The divisions into classes, my lord, are not artificial. They are the natural outcome of a civilised society." (to Lady Mary): "There must always be a master and servants in all civilised communities, my lady, for it is natural and whatever is natural is right." -

*Lord Loam* (wincing) : " It is very unnatural for me to stand here and allow you to talk such nonsense."

*Crichton* (eagerly) : " Yes, my lord, it is. That is what I have been striving to point out to your lordship."

The act fortunately ends before it becomes farcical, with the Loam household preparing for a yachting trip with *Crichton* to accompany Lord Loam as his man. It is a great concession on the part of the dignified butler and he explains why he has done this thing.

*Catherine* : " And you have done this for us, Crichton, because you thought that—that father needed to be kept in his place."

*Crichton* : " I should prefer you to say, my lady, that I have done it for the house."

So we leave the inhabitants of Lord Loam's house yawning and discussing the eccentric party.

Although we have not in this play travelled very far in time, we have travelled very far in distance when the second act opens. We find that the Loam family and Crichton have had the misfortune to be wrecked in the Pacific and have been cast on to a desert island. It will not be out of the scope of this chapter to point out a rather grave error Barrie has made in the opening lines of the second act of this play. These are the lines which have led him to an error of judgment, one of those peculiar errors that all writers seem to make at some time or other.

*Agatha* : " But Ernest, it was Crichton who jumped overboard trying to save father."<sup>11</sup>

*Ernest* : " Well, you know, it was rather silly of uncle to fling away his life by trying to get into the boat first."<sup>11</sup>

Lord Loam is quite evidently a peculiar peer, he has socialist ideas but above all we understand Barrie means him to be a gentleman. Why then does he wish here to give us the impression that in a moment of acute danger,

he behaved in a manner, unusual in that of an English nobleman? Is it the peculiar Scotch humour of Barrie, is it that he let the lines pass and did not see the gross libel on Lord Loam's character. Probably the last explanation is the true one. That Lord Loam, as we subsequently learn, was not drowned has nothing whatever to do with the question. Barrie has erred badly and there is really no excuse for his conduct.

Apart from this lamentable error this act is extremely interesting and allows us to see the character of Crichton completely changing. By a slow process he becomes, no longer the obsequious servant, but the leader of enterprises. Not the least usefulness of his work is that which consists in ducking the Hon. Ernest every time he makes an epigram. All through the act, after he has returned, Lord Loam conducts himself with a silly pomposity, which clearly indicates that Barrie knows nothing about desert islands, though fortunately it doesn't matter much to this play. The act ends with Crichton becoming so aggressive that Lord Loam with a singular want of perception takes his departure to another part of the island. But Crichton knowing human nature, surely far too well, for such an admirable manservant, turns the pot of stew in the direction, in which the wayfarers will gain its appetising smell, and with the curtain they have come back, human nature has been overcome, as in the days of the Israelites, by a mess of pottage.

When the third act opens, the shipwrecked Lord Loam and his family have been on the island some two years. No ship has sailed near, it seems as if none will. The perfect Crichton has assumed command of everybody and he has acquired a slightly bullying manner, that manner always assumed by those who having been accustomed to be ruled, come to the position of ruling.

Crichton with the aid of Tweeny has established a most remarkable home on the island and Lord Loam much subdued has been made to do some work. The act at times becomes a little wearisome, it is spun out to a quite unnecessary length and we are not sorry when the climax is reached and the supercilious Lady Mary becomes the betrothed of Crichton, despite the fact that she has acquired the habit of calling him "Guv."<sup>11</sup> So far have they gone from their original positions in Mayfair, that they would both wish to forget it.

*Crichton* : " I am thinking of two people whom neither of us has seen for a long time—Lady Mary Lasenby and one Crichton a butler."<sup>11</sup>

*Lady Mary* : " That cold, haughty, insolent girl. Gov; look around you and forget them both."<sup>11</sup>

Just before the end of this act, a ship is sighted and the sojourn on the island is over, Crichton knows well enough what it will mean, but if he is a butler, he is also a brave soul.

*Crichton* : " Bill Crichton has got to play the game,"

There is in the last lines of this act a pathetic note. It is that note of pathos that sounds when something beautiful comes to an end, when the last post plays over the grave of the old soldier, when the schoolboy weeps that the dead march is being played for the headmaster, he once hated, when the ship with every turn of the screw leaves the white cliffs of home farther behind.

*Lady Mary* : " Dear Gov ; I will never give you up."

(There is a salt smile on his face as he shakes his head to her. He lets the cloak slip to the ground. She will not take this for an answer ; again her arms go out to him. Then comes the great renunciation. By an effort of will he ceases to be an erect figure ; he has the humble bearing of a servant. His hands come together as if he were washing them).

*Crichton* (it is the speech of his life) : " My lady."<sup>1</sup>

(She goes away. There is none to salute him now, unless we do it),

We shall do so with great humbleness, for of all the virtues renunciation is perhaps the most perfect.

In the fourth act we are once again back in Lord Loam's Mayfair house and all go back to

their original positions. Crichton is once more the butler and Lady Mary is once more Lady Mary. The last lines in the play are reserved for them.

*Lady Mary* : " Do you despise me, Crichton ? You are the best man among us."

*Crichton* : " On an island, my lady, perhaps, but in England, no.<sup>11</sup>"

*Lady Mary* : " Then there is something wrong with England."

*Crichton* : " My lady, not even from you can I listen to a word against England."<sup>11</sup>

*Lady Mary* : " Tell me one thing : you have not lost your courage ? "

*Crichton* : " No, my lady."<sup>11</sup>

(She goes, He turns out the lights).

. . . . .

If we criticise this play from the point of view of Realism, we shall be forced to admit that it is extremely far fetched. But it is not the way to understand *Barrie*, to condemn him too much, for a lack of Realism. It is not the place to enter into general criticisms of *Barrie* here ; such a task must be left to a later chapter. What we have to do is to endeavour to detect the weaknesses and the strength of *The Admirable Crichton*. This play undoubtedly does deal with a social problem, which is the question of equality. It does not solve the problem, beyond suggesting in no uncertain tones, that equality

which demands that all men shall be equal, is doomed to failure. On the other hand, if it is meant by equality, that all men can rise above their environment, can show the attributes of courage, can play the man, then this play indicates that in this sense "equality" is a practical thing. The play indicates this "equality" in both its senses.

In the very first act, it is quite apparent that there can be no equality in the Mayfair house of Lord Loam. If his Lordship does not mind handing cups of tea and slices of cake to his servants, Crichton does not intend that there shall be equality in the servant's quarters. But on the island those who are of nobler birth do not excel in courage, and those of humbler position are quite as courageous.

Crichton is of course a wonderful creation. He is the very essence of the Barrie genius. We can find him anytime we like to call in Berkeley Square or Curzon Street. He is the perfect butler, he has a due respect for titles, he has the proper contempt for the page boy. Crichton is an insufferable snob, we can see him but coldly polite if we arrived at his door carrying our own Gladstone bag, we can see him obsequious if we rolled up in our best town car. Yet Crichton has his good qualities, he has abundant courage, both physical, and that much harder courage, moral. His conduct on the island is what we should expect, arrogant and bullying, yet on his return to Mayfair he returns to being a butler. And he can give up Lady Mary ; no small thing,

because no doubt, Barrie, wishes us to realise that Crichton really loved her. It was not a case of a butler loving his mistress for worldly advantages.

Lord Loam is a poor character whose only virtue is that he sometimes tries to overcome his natural lack of brains.

Most of Barrie's plays are of a character to appeal to women, especially to rather sentimental single women who are not too old to have lost their dreams. It is probable that *The Admirable Crichton* is much more a play to appeal to men rather than to women. Barrie has forsaken his special task of describing an interesting woman. This play is undoubtedly, apart from the "moral" of it, a study of the character of a man, a person who is a butler becomes a man and then becomes a butler again. It is of course true that much of the play has to do with Lady Mary, but she is really only an auxiliary, she is there to bring out the best of Crichton, and she does so when she lets him return to being a butler. She is not an arresting figure, her conduct is so exactly what we should expect, that it is not really worth much consideration. That she should have become engaged to Crichton, when the island seemed to be likely to be their permanent resting place, is probably the most realistic touch in the play; but we do not want to apply the test of realism to Barrie.

• Though not by any means the best of Barrie's plays, it is by no means the worst. The third act is no doubt necessary to the play; it was

impossible for Barrie to finish the play without getting the characters back again to Mayfair ; or at least it was necessary, if Crichton was to become, as Barrie has made him—a fine figure. But the act is a little tiresome at times, too much savouring of the conventional desert scene in the pantomime.

The first act and the last are easily the best, Crichton is much more natural as a butler, than as the "titled" lord of Tiler Island, Lady Mary is much more herself as the supercilious peer's daughter, than when she is " Polly " on the desert island. At the end of the play, there is something that is pathetic about the whole situation, something wistful (and what of Barrie is not ?), something that we feel is always happening just round the corner. In giving up Lady Mary, Crichton accomplished something fine, for it was not a mere butler giving up a lady, but a man giving up a woman, indeed, at the time, *the* woman. Whether Lady Mary would have made a good wife to Crichton is not an irrelevant question, for we feel that Barrie himself is not quite sure. Probably they would have been divorced and we rather think Lady Mary might have confessed, that she preferred chauffeurs to butlers. As it is Barrie gives her Lord Brocklehurst, a typical Mayfair product, a young man, with boorish manners and an empty head, a not uncommon combination. Crichton, we like to infer married Tweeny and no doubt settles down, to ruminate sometimes that he once nearly married a high<sup>1</sup> born lady.

## *Chapter Five*

### DEAR BRUTUS

**W**ITH "Dear Brutus" we have to deal with a Barrie a long way removed from the Barrie of "Quality Street" or the "Admirable Crichton." "Dear Brutus" is without any doubt, the most perfect expression of the Barrie genius, that genius which makes us sob when we feel we ought to laugh, to laugh when we feel we ought to cry, the genius that sends us miles back to the days when we played with tin soldiers, the days we played horses down the country lanes, the days when we were stupid enough to wish we might grow up. For it is in the melancholy wistfulness, the soft glow of mournfulness, that we come upon the essence of Barrie.

But without delaying we must describe this most famous play, that has stamped Barrie for all time as one of the most brilliant playwrights the English stage has yet produced.

When the curtain goes up, we are at once thrown into an air of mystery, we have that feeling that steals over us, when the lamp is extinguished and the room falls into the nothingness of darkness, when the moon suddenly disappears behind a dark cloud, and the white road

through the wood becomes dark and full of secret menace.

" The scene is a darkened room, which the curtain reveals so stealthily that if there was a mouse on the stage it is there still. Our object is to catch our two chief characters unaware ; they are Darkness and Light.<sup>1</sup> Enough to tell us that the people we are going to get to know about are in a state of indecision.

Gradually with the light for the moment prevailing, we find that we are in a room in which there are five ladies. They are Mrs. Coady, Mrs. Dearth, Joanna Trout, Mrs. Purdie and Lady Caroline Lancy. These five ladies are the guests of Lob, an eccentric kind of host who is a little terrifying. The ladies are deep in a plot, for they scent something mysterious about the house, and they mean to get it out of Matey, the inscrutable butler. The height of the mystery is that Lob has invited his guests to be present for Midsummer night. Matey has been detected in stealing rings, and the ladies will only let him off, if he tells them something about his master Lob. However they do not get much satisfaction but he gives them a word of warning.

*Matey* : " Above all, ladies, I wouldn't go into the wood."<sup>1</sup>

For we soon discover that in the part of the country where our five ladies are the guests of Lob, the villagers say that on Midsummer's night a mysterious wood appears, and that those who enter it never return. And not long after

we discover that these mortals of the first act, are a worthless set of people who each and all wish that they were something else, that they could change their life's partner. Barrie gives us apt glimpses of the various people who are always sighing for someone or something else, their conversation is not in the least important, it is much of the kind of chatter we should expect to hear between a newly divorced couple. But it does all that is required, it opens the way to the great essence of the play, that essence that is really beautiful, that essence which has perhaps taught many thousands that their own position in life is the best. And at last the guests ask Lob what happens in this mysterious wood, there is so much speculation about.

*Purdie* : " How now Dearth ? "

*Dearth* : " What is it we get in that wood Lob ? "

*Alice* : " Ah ? he won't tell us that."

*Lob* : " Come on ! "

*Alice* : " Tell us first.<sup>11</sup>

*Lob* (forced to the disclosure) : " They say that in the wood you get what nearly everybody here is longing for—a second chance."

*Joanna* : " So that is what we have in common.<sup>11</sup>

*Coad* : " I have often thought Coady, that if I had a second chance I should be a useful man, instead of just a lazy one."

So we find with the explanation of the secret

of the wood, they rush to the windows of the room and behold, that which had not been there, when the curtains had been drawn. How often do we not wish that we might draw the curtain aside and gaze upon something that is different to what we expect, yet do we not sigh when once and for all the curtain does shut out for ever the familiar sight. How we should love the cold drab street, if we knew when the curtain had fallen, it would never rise again, for our eyes to behold the scene. There might be in the place of the drab street, a river of gold, a mountain of silver, a lake of diamonds, but one day we should cry with a bitter cry, let us have once more our drab street, let us once more gaze upon the gleaming light of the lamps, let us once more see the well-known passers by, let us once more draw up the curtain, so that it might disclose the scene it had hidden, when it fell.

*Dearth* (as they are going out by the door) :  
<sup>11</sup> Stop, why not go this way ? "

(He pulls the curtains apart and there comes a sudden indrawing of breath from all, for no garden is there now. In its place is an endless wood of great trees ; the nearest of them has come to the window. It is a sombre wood, with splashes of moonlight and of blackness standing very still in it).

Thus the poor discontented mortals enter the wood, while Lob faintly wondering watches.

*Matey* : " Great heavens, then its true ! "  
*Lob* : " Yes, but I—I wasn't sure.<sup>17</sup>

In the second act we find ourselves, as we should expect in the middle of the mysterious wood. In this act, the finest dialogue in perhaps the whole of Barrie's plays is given to us, it is that between Dearth and the daughter, Margaret, a might-have-been. In the scene in the wood also is displayed a quality of Barrie, that we are apt to think is rather inclined to take a second place. For the humour of Barrie has not found the measure of praise his pathos has. But for sheer humour, the scene between Matey and Lady Caroline is hard to beat, it is in a sense something like part of the dialogue between Crichton and Lady Mary, when they are on the desert island. The contrast between the pathos of the Dearth and Margaret scene and the humour of the Matey and Lady Caroline scene is so marked, that I shall give both the dialogues in some detail. For the rest of the act, it is not necessary to say more than that we are the witnesses of the various people, who longing for a change of partner, have that wish gratified, and longing for a second chance, have that also. The second chance have turned Matey and Lady Caroline into man and wife, and this is their delightfully humorous conversation.

It is real humour and is in no way forced, for it is that delightful but really beautiful conversation that takes place between those who have found in marriage, all that they imagined they would find.

*Lady Caroline* : " Is it not a lovely night, Jim. Listen, my own, to Philomel; he is saying that he is lately married. So are we, you ducky thing. I feel, Jim, that I am Rosalind and that you are my Orlando.<sup>1</sup>"

*Matey* : " What do you say I am, Carolyn? "

*Lady Caroline* : " My own one, don't you think it would be fun if we were to write poems about each other and pin them on the tree trunks ? "

*Matey* : " Poems ? I never knew such a lass for high flown language."

*Lady Caroline* : " Your lass, dearest. Jim's lass."

*Matey* (pulling her ear) : " And don't you forget it."

*Lady Caroline* : " What would you do if I were to forget it, great bear ? "

*Matey* : " Take a stick to you."

*Lady Caroline* : " I love to hear you talk like that ; it is so verile. I always knew that it was a master I needed. "

*Matey* : " It's what you all need."

It is of course a bold thing to pick out a passage and say that it may be the best of all the lines in Barrie's plays. But I have picked out the dialogue between Dearth and Margaret because I like it better than any other, which is after all a very good reason for my choosing. No doubt lovers of Barrie will readily call to mind other passages that they think far superior, if when

they read this book, they will let me know I shall be delighted to discover a passage that may be superior to this one, but I shall not be persuaded easily. For it is in this passage that Barrie shows really perfect understanding of what he is writing, there is no imagination, but solid fact. For of all the poor little tragedies that the busy world seldom thinks much about, there is not a more poignant one, than that time when the parent suddenly realises that his child is no longer a child, but a grown up man or a grown up woman. It is that moment when the boy leaves home as a boy for the last time, when the girl leaves her dolls behind her, and puts up her hair. Yet parents have these sad moments almost from the day of the birth of their children, there is that moment when the little boy no longer cares to play with the toy soldiers, when he no longer likes to shoot at them with the toy cannon, of which he is always a little afraid, when the little girl no longer is content to play in the nursery, but wants to be away with the big girl round the corner of the long white lane.

In the first act we remember that Dearth is always sad that he had no daughter, in the second act, in the wood, we imagine his wishes have been fulfilled and he has a daughter Margaret. The conversation is of the dreadful moment when Margaret wants to put up her hair. It is for Dearth his great sad moment, it is the sequel to the little boy who no longer wants to knock the bold tin soldier over with his rubber cannon balls. •

The conversation between Dearth and Margaret of course takes up a greater part of the second act and I can only give some of the most pathetic and charming lines in it.

*Dearth* : " Fame is rot ; daughters are the thing."<sup>1</sup>

*Margaret* : " Daughters are the thing."

*Dearth* : " Daughters are the thing."<sup>1f</sup>

*Margaret* : " I wonder if sons would be even nicer ? "

*Dearth* : " Not a patch on daughters. The awful thing about a son is that never, never, at least from the day he leaves school can you tell him you rather like him. By the time he is ten you can't even take him on your knee. Sons are not worth having, Margaret. Signed. W. Dearth,"<sup>1</sup>

*Margaret*: "But if you were a mother, Dad, I daresay he would let you do it."<sup>11</sup>

*Dearth* : " Think so ? "

*Margaret* : " I mean when no one was looking. Sons are not so bad. Signed M. Dearth. But I'm glad you prefer daughters. At what age are we nicest, Daddy ? "

*Dearth* : " Eh ? That's a poser. I think you were nicest when you were two and and knew your alphabet up to *G* but fell over at *H*. No, you were best when you were half past three ; or just before you struck six ; or in the mumps year, when I asked you in the early morning, how you were and you said solemnly <sup>r</sup> I haven't tried yet."<sup>1</sup> "

So this whimsical melancholy conversation goes on, it is all so light-hearted outwardly, so pathetic when we look down into it, it is the father trying to think his daughter is still a child and the daughter trying to respond to the attempt. Thus when we arrive at the climax when Margaret wishes to put up her hair, we are not surprised the stalls whimper and the gallery sobs loudly at this delicious piece of Barrie pathos.

*Margaret* : " No, no, it will be lucky to you, for it isn't to be a bit like that. I am to be a girl and woman day about for the first year. You will never know which I am till you look at my hair. And even then you won't know, for if it is down I shall put it up and if it is up I shall put it down. And so my Daddy will gradually get used to the idea."

*Dearth* : " I see you have been thinking it out.<sup>11</sup>

*Margaret* : " I have been doing more than that. Shut your-eyes, Dad, and I shall give you a glimpse into the future."

*Dearth* : " I don't know that I want that, the present is so good."

*Margaret* : " Shut your eyes please."

*Dearth* : " No Margaret."

*Margaret* : " Please Daddy,"

*Dearth* : " Oh, all right, they are shut."

*Margaret* : " Don't open them till I tell jyou. What finger is that ? "

*Dearth* : " The dirty one."

*Margaret* : " Daddy, now I am putting up my hair. I have got such a darling of a mirror. It is such a darling mirror I've got, Dad. Dad, don't look, I shall tell you about it. It is a little pool of water. I wish we could take it home and hang it up. Of course the moment my hair is up there will be other changes also ; for instance I shall talk quite differently."

Then suddenly Barrie gives us one of those nasty shivers, which make us wonder if it is that the attendant has left the door open, or if it is a shiver that comes within ourselves ? It is the latter, that uncomfortable feeling when we suddenly realise one day we shall die, one day we shall lie in a bed and wonder if we shall pass through the ceiling or out of the window, or will it be anywhere ? It is of the nature of the shiver when we look out of the window, when we see on the other side of the street an old man and we realise with a shudder that even we, we with all our youth, shall not be young for ever.

*Dearth* : " Stand still, dear, and let me look my fill. The Margaret that is to be."

*Margaret* : " You'll see me often enough Daddy, like this, so you don't need to look your fill. You are looking as long as if this were to be the only time."

*Dearth* (with an odd tremor) : " Was I ? surely it isn't to be that,"

But it is and this is why we have experienced

the shiver. An old woman passes by, we recognise her as Alice, who is or was in the first act, Dearth's wife. The attraction is too strong, Dearth, though he has longed for a daughter, longs for his wife more, so he follows her and we realise that Barrie is going to get us out of the wood, with the people finding after all that their own position is better than the experimental one. Margaret is powerless to stop him. Her last line is the most sad of the whole play, it is so hopeless, we can do nothing for her, though we weep, we cannot change her lot, though we would give all we possess to make Margaret feel her last words are not true, the curtain falls with its accustomed swish and we sit very, very still. For these last words have eaten into our soul.

*Margaret* : " Daddy, come back ; I don't want to be a might-have-been."

With the third act we are back again in Lob's room, the people come stealing in from the wood, memory comes back to them. For a time they seem to be contented with the partners of the wood, but then comes a vague longing and each finds after all his or her own life and partner is really the best one. This is the scene at the end of this beautiful play, the wood has gone, we shall never see it again.

" The garden has returned, and our queer little hero is busy at work among his flowers.

A lark is rising.<sup>11</sup>

. . . . .

It would be indeed hard to find a play that would have a greater influence on our present outlook, than *Dear Brutus*. Almost tenderly it points the lesson that the almost universal discontent man has with his own position in life is the greatest mistake. With gentle irony Barrie shows us that we are as we were made, once and for all, that the second chance, if it came to us, would be no better used than the first chance.

One of the most remarkable failures of present day life is marriage, when it should be one of the most remarkable triumphs. Divorce is now considered as being the logical step of the very modern marriage. The modern woman, whose chief characteristic is superficiality, mainly caused by her desperate attempts to become unsexed, professes daily her utter boredom with life, yet, if she were told that she would die ere nightfall, would pray all the gods that life might bore her a little longer.

There are few, if any of us, who do not sigh that we might have our life over again, that we might start afresh, yet we have a very uneasy feeling that we should still be the same.

Barrie with delicate pathos and delicious humour introduces us to as unsatisfactory a set of people, as it is possible to imagine. The men for the most part are cads and the women are modern. Their great cry, as we have seen, is that they shall start again, that their life partner shall be someone else. The only one who in any way commands our respect is Death, who,

drunkard as he is, sighs for the joy of having a daughter. Lady Caroline is of course as inane as we should expect her to be, we can always find her at Ascot, or in the winter selling programmes at six times their value at charity matinees. That she marries Matey in the Wood scene is really quite unnecessary to the play, except that we should lose the humour of Barrie at its richest.

Barrie certainly in the play leaves us in no doubt that he has no sympathy for a second chance to make us better, nor has he any sympathy for the woman who is always wanting someone other than her husband, or the husband who is always desirous of someone other than his wife. With the desire of Dearth for a daughter, Barrie quite evidently *has* sympathy, and if the relations between Dearth and his daughter Margaret are what would really have happened, then Dearth *did* miss much, and his character might easily have been steadier. But Dearth with his sighing for a daughter is not in the same category as the other people who are merely tired of their life partners, and crave for a new sensation. In spite of his habits of hard drinking Dearth seems to be sincere and we feel that the wood scene is all the more melancholy because of this. It is so different with the other worthless moderns who appear to have neither constancy nor good bleeding.

If Dear Brutus in any way fails, it is in this, that with the exception of Dearth, the characters wish to change their lot in life merely for their

own selfish advantages. That the change when it does come is a disappointment merely points the moral that we are best as we are, that it is better to be ourselves and glory in it, than to be longing to be the person next door,

Had the people in *Dear Brutus* wished to alter their positions in life for really worthy motives, it might be that Barrie would have shown us that in such a case the change was good. As it is, however, the moral of *Dear Brutus* leaves us in no perplexity, that our own life is the best and our own partner is the best. Whether of course, such a position holds good universally is of the nature of a speculation: we mortals do not get a second chance, we pass but once and leave behind but a faint impression of our passing.

Yet life is a glorious thing, though we throw it away as though it were for ever ; if we have the glory of the moon, we sigh for the glory of the stars; if we have the glory of the sun, we sigh for the glory of the moon. But *Dear Brutus* strikes a grave note, we may sigh for changes, but when they come, we sigh for that which we so despised, yet was ours.

It is perhaps late in the night, the years that are to come are but few; it is perhaps early in the day, the days that are to come are so numerous, we think we can waste them; we have perhaps made our life choice, then across the valley, we imagine someone fairer. But we have once and for all lived our years and once and for all chosen, we cannot turn back or start afresh

and if we did then Dear Brutus tells us quietly  
and with constraint that we are best as we are,  
So we come out of the wood of disillusion into  
the fair garden of hope, determined that, as the  
guests of the mischievous, lovable Lob, we will  
remain as we are and the people of the Wood  
shall be but an idle dream.

## Chapter Six

### ALICE SIT BY THE FIRE

**P**ERHAPS one of the greatest charms of Barrie is that he takes us back to quite a different age from our own. Why this should be a charm may not be apparent to all people. Very many to-day with a grand show of optimism declare that the present age is far the most superior that has yet been. This is but a polite way of saying that we are the most superior people who have yet inhabited the earth. It will be necessary at this stage in our study of Sir James Barrie, to confine ourselves to a particular question. "Alice Sit By The Fire" is about one thing only and that one thing is the mind of a woman. Before describing the action of the play, it is not an unreasonable digression to consider what is the trend of the modern woman in our time. For we shall have to determine when we look at the meaning of this play whether Barrie is right in making his heroine so completely different from the girl of to-day.

The modern girl of our time in every way is the product of our modern outlook. Having shaken herself free from the early Victorian

bonds of rigid convention, she has very largely deteriorated.

It would be out of the question to find her endowed with any virtue. She is largely a cocktail drinking caricature of her sex. Competition with men has made her rough, rude, immodest and quite incapable of appreciating her own place in the universe. Continually chafing at the man-made laws of the country, the modern woman spends much thought and energy in attempting to become "masculine."<sup>11</sup> Stripping herself of as many feminine attributes as possible, the modern woman adorns herself with an easy contempt of marriage, a nodding acquaintance with divorce, a sceptical disregard for her fate after death and an utter failure to realise that in a million years she will be alive somewhere. Much as there was that was superficial in the attitude of the Victorian girl to life, her superiority to the modern girl was so immense in every way, that it is an impossible task to attempt a comparison. In passing it may be said that lately Barrie has appeared as the champion of the modern girl, in doing so, he has uttered some of the most trivial superficialities, a genius has ever given tongue to, we can only hope that some day he will realise how far far better is Miss Liwy of "Quality Street" to Miss X.Y.Z. of "Wallasey High School," how much sweeter is Amy of "Alice Sit By The Fire" to the thin lipped young girl students of St. Andrews University.

In the first act we are introduced to a room

in a house in Brompton, it is so long ago that we can't think it can be the same London that roars along just the other side of the window pane. Let us look out for once and then close the window on old London for ever. We look out, it is a spring morning, the hansom cabs are jingling by with the sound of distant sleigh bells, tall men walk by with top hats and frock coats, wonderful ladies in wonderful carriages, drawn by wonderful horses pass by with the clatter of prancing cavalry, just a little way off the horse buses rumble by, the drivers lifting their whips with the delicate flourish of a duke as he turns his coach into the enclosure on Gold Cup Day down on dear old brown Ascot Heath. Thus if we looked out of the window in the days of "Alice Sit By The Fire."

Let us again look out of the window, the scene is horribly different, taxi cabs dash by with a noise of throbbing, leaving a trail of petrol behind in a blue liquid, men hurry by with attache cases, girls dressed as only typists can dress, hurry along, too commercial even to see that the sun has turned the street to gold, the houses into palaces, the trees to a delicate green. Not far off (oh most hateful of all), like moles, humanity descends into the middle of the earth to an odious tube train which screeches along as though it enjoyed rushing its money grubbing " complement " under the modern Babylon.

So we find the occupants of the room, indeed early Victorian, none of your moderns here with their perpetual use of slang. Amy Grey, her

brother, and her friend are awaiting the return of their parents from India. They, that is, Amy and her friend Ginevra are discussing the plays they have seen, for lately they have been going daily. Until they saw these plays, they were, so Barrie tells us " unbleached school girls."

Not far off the youngest child is peacefully sleeping. It is the day of the return of Colonel and Mrs. Grey. When they arrive somehow all seems to go wrong. The Colonel's son is mortally afraid that his father will kiss him, and in consequence assumes a coldness to his father which he probably does not really feel.

The baby daughter does not appear to care much for her mother, but prefers to pull the Colonel's moustache. Amy treats her mother as though she was a stranger and poor Mrs. Grey is much depressed by her homecoming. Thus we are plunged into the middle of a domestic comedy which isn't far from being a four-walled tragedy. We are then introduced to Mr. Steve Rollo, who has looked upon Mrs. Grey in the past as " The Belle of The Punjaub," He makes an arrangement to see Mrs. Grey that very evening at his chambers (awful word this to the Victorians) and even goes so far as kissing her. It so happens that Amy happens to be an onlooker of all this and of course is outrageously shocked. It has been her ambition, since she has been so much to the theatre, to save someone, therefore here is her chance, Her mother is going to the chambers of a MAN and she must be saved. So, with the Barrie, characteristic

of impersonation, or in this case proxy, Amy determines to save her mother from Rollo's villainy, by herself visiting him first and teaching him the error of his libertine ways. So we come to the fall of the curtain on the first act, with promise of some fun in the next and we wonder how Barrie is going to employ his brilliance on this domestic "contretemps."

Probably all of us have our own ideas of what a man's chambers should look like, though Barrie tells us what they *should* be like. The description is so excellent, it is so much like what we should expect Barrie to describe, it is so exactly theatrical, that quotation shall do its duty and let us into the secret.

"It should be a handsome, sombre room in oak and dark red, with sinister easy chairs and couches, great curtains discreetly drawn, a door to enter by, a door to hide by, a carelessly strewn table on which to write a letter reluctantly to dictation, another table exquisitely decorated for two, champagne in an ice bucket, many rows of books which on close examination will prove to be painted wood, (the stage Lotharios not being really reading men.)"

This then would be what Amy might expect to find on her mission to save her mother's reputation. Instead she finds this !

"But Steve cannot have such a room as this : he has only two hundred and fifty

pounds a year, including the legacy from his aunt. Besides, though he is to be a Lothario (in so far as we can manage it) he is not at present aware of this, and has made none of the necessary arrangements : if one of his lamps is knocked over it will certainly explode ; and there cannot be a secret door without its leading into the adjoining house."

In this act we are allowed to make the acquaintance of a very delightful little person named Richardson who is a drudge who eats chops which her master leaves over, and has arrived at the age of fifteen. She is the " man " Amy expects to find in Steve's bachelor chambers. This act moves well, we discover the surprise with which Steve regards the visit of Amy. A little later, instead of Alice coming along, Colonel Grey calls in and Amy hides in a cupboard.

While this truly delightful situation is proceeding covered by this kind of dialogue, Alice comes in.

*Steve* : " You haven't come here to talk about your confounded baby again, have you ? "

*Colonel* : " If you don't mind.<sup>M</sup>

*Steve* : " I do mind."

*Colonel* : " But if you feel you can stand it."

*Steve* : " You are my guest, so go ahead."

*Colonel* : " She fell asleep, Steve, holding my finger! "

Quite by chance Alice discovers that her daughter Amy is hiding in Steve's room. So the tables are turned and it becomes the mother who wishes to save the daughter. A good deal of violent dialogue gets us through the act, when it is becoming a little overdrawn in certain ways.

In the third act we are back again in the room in the house in Brompton. We discover very soon that Alice never really cared a jot for Steve. She knew her daughter would like to do something to save her, so she kisses Steve and pretends to indulge in a flirtation. Thus the Colonel explains the ironic situation to Steve, who no doubts feels extremely small.

*Colonel* : " She saw you kiss Alice here this afternoon, you scoundrel, and, as she thought make an *assignation* with you. There, it all came out of that. She is a sentimental lady, is our Amy, and she has been too often to the theatre."

Then from Alice we get the explanation of *her* trick.

*Alice* : " Because she thinks she has saved me and it makes her so happy. Amy has a passionate desire to be of some use in this world she knows so well, and she already sees her sphere, Steve—it is to look after me. I am not to be her chaperone, it is she who is to be mine, I have submitted, you see.

So this play of cross purposes draws to an

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end. It is the end of Alice as the " belle," we can hear the funeral note for her as the curtain swiches down, but with the sound there breaks upon the ear from far away, the noise of the chime of silver bells. We are not told, but we imagine that they are for Steve Rollo and Amy Grey. And late that night, we shall find " Alice Sit By The Fire " perhaps dreaming of her wedding day when she was too a young girl.

. . . . .

It has been a popular criticism that this play is not worthy of Barrie. Such a criticism falls to the ground if we realise that Barrie certainly never meant " Alice Sit By The Fire " to be his best play. It is one of the superficialities of our dramatic critics, that they will not judge a play on its own particular merits, but by comparison with what has gone before.

Thus when we read that a comedy is poor, we may rest assured that what the critic means is this, that " Alice Sit By The Fire " is not so good as " Dear Brutus," or that " Quality Street "has not the genius of "Mary Rose." If we compare the plays of Barrie, we shall come to the very ready conclusion that they are extremely different in outlook, but I do not think they can be said to fail in the point of view of merit. While "Dear Brutus " is a grander play than " Alice Sit By The Fire," it does not follow necessarily that " Dear Brutus " is a better play. For Barrie, to be judged rightly, must not be judged by a method of parallelism, each play

needs to be considered apart. Without any apology for using the word, which means so much, yet so often so little, "clever" is the word that fits the comedy we are considering.

Very possibly "Alice Sit By The Fire" is the most realistic and the least mystical play Barrie has yet written. We feel ourselves in a Victorian background, in Amy we discover the girl, who for ever seems to have been killed by the Great War. We feel that the attache case carrying woman with the short skirt and the volume of vulgar slang, has not yet been born.

It is of course true that Amy has not got depth of character, a clever girl would not have been surprised that her mother, a "belle" of an Indian military station, should have leanings towards a good-looking but brainless coxcombe. But it is not out of the bounds of probability to find such a girl desirous to save her mother from an indiscretion, which harmless in India would be very differently construed in London. Amy is a very real character and in this I am glad to disagree with the dramatic critics, who being unable to see beyond the modern girl, accuse Barrie of the creation of an utterly improbable young woman. In fact Amy is really a noble character, because she expected something very dreadful at Steve's chambers and was quite prepared to risk it. Her silliness in attempting to look after her very worldly mother, is a good proof of her reality, for many girls before the war might have thus acted.

Alice herself is of course extremely skilfully

drawn, she is mischievous, fascinating, futile and withal typical of the married flirt, whose prey are subalterns, whose puppets are majors, whose morals are determined by how far morality may be broken without risk of serious inconvenience. That she learns a lesson is Barrie's way of telling us that married flirts reign just so long as they are young enough, then they may indeed sit by the fire, dream of the dance, hear the soft whispers of the night wind on the terrace. Yet Alice is not really a bad woman, she is merely the Colonel's wife, who is rather expected to be the darling of the blue-eyed subalterns.

Steve is a young fool, who deserved the thickest part of the Colonel's boot in the tenderest part of the body. The Colonel himself is a typical officer, a gentleman and perhaps a little more, a really considerate officer. " *Alice Sit By The Fire* " is a clever domestic comedy, with a touch of satire, but lacking the whimsicality of much of Barrie's work. Yet the dialogue is charming, we are almost sorry for Alice, we feel with her the moment when in the looking glass we see the first grey hair which tells us once and for all youth has gone, as the sun dispels once and for all the early mists of the morning.

## *Chapter Seven*

### A KISS FOR CINDERELLA

**I**T is not perhaps an exaggeration, to find in the title of this play, something that is really Holy. The story of Cinderella is the most delightful of all the fairy tales that have ever been written. Possibly the purest writing that has ever been done, is the fairy tale. The fairy tale is in some ways the highest expression of childhood. It lives in company with those mortals who live in the nursery, those mortals who have jam for tea when they are good, those mortals who creep to the window when the moon peeps out, to see the fairies come out of the daffodils, crawl down from the rose bushes, dance to the sound of bells and harps.

Yet to-day the modern mother is rather sceptical of her child's belief in fairies, she is inclined to think it unpractical, a little behind the times, perhaps even slightly on the side of superstition. Yet the child's world of fairies is the most beautiful there is, because it is based on faith in charming little immortals, it has no touch of selfishness, even may it be that belief in fairies is the child's most practical form of

religion. Once let it be thought that the glade is not the entrance to the fairy castle, once let it be thought that the bluebells do not talk to the elves, once let it be thought that Father Christmas is not an immortal, does not come down the chimney, does not carry a heavy bag of toys, and the delightful essence of childhood has gone. There is nothing so unpractical as a belief in fairies, there is nothing so unworldly, there is nothing so anti-modern, but there is nothing in this world that is so utterly Divine.

There is something melancholy in the title<sup>11</sup> "A Kiss for Cinderella," it reminds us of days when we had no idea that people were ever bad, when we had no idea the world that ended at the next village (or seemed to) was the best of all worlds, when we had no idea that of all the joys in after life, none came up to the morning walk after lessons, to buy the large bar of chocolate cream, when the village grocer laughed and told us we should be sick if we ate it before lunch. It reminds us of the time when we thought the Prince Charming would ride over the hills, it reminds us of the day the Prince Charming did come, but not in a radiant suit, but in a frock coat, or the princess who came, not in a six horsed coach, but in a large carriage.

Barrie at once with the title gets us into a frame of mind that is not cynical, the "kiss"<sup>M</sup> soothes, while "Cinderella" once again makes us children, once again, thinking of the pumpkin, once again looking round at the fireplace with a start, fancying The Fairy Godmother has come

down the chimney, fancying that twelve o'clock will never come, and of course we shall leave the ball in time.

In the first act we find that we have got into a studio, in which resides Mr. Bodie, a distinguished artist, with sixty-three years of his life passed and as yet (what an optimist is Barrie) no wife. We are in the period of the Great War, and we would here take the opportunity of saying at once that Barrie doesn't quite convince us with his plays dealing with this period. A policeman has arrived to complain that Mr. Bodie is showing too much light, for it is the time that German aeroplanes might be about, and having no special respect for elderly artists, they might drop bombs. While they are talking about possibilities of plots and the stealing of boxes, one of Barrie's delightful little characters is brought to notice. She is a little drudge who is called Cinderella and mothers Mr. Bodie.

There is no character which so excites our ready sympathy as the drudge, though her face is lined with grime, we would certainly kiss her lips, if she permitted such familiarity, though she slapped down our best dishes with a horrid crash, we would never scold her, for though the drudge is in the world of no importance, we have an idea she is really far more valuable than the supercilious ladies who walk in Kensington because they are too superior to do anything else. Bodie is really a little frightened of Cinderella, this is how she takes him to task.

*Cinderella* : " Did you rang, sir ? "

*Bodie* : " Did I ? I did but I don't know why. If you're a good servant, you ought to know why."

*Cinderella* : (taking possession of him) :  
" There you go again ! Fifty years have you been at it and you can't hold a seegarette in your mouth yet."

*Bodie* : " I won't be brushed. I will not be scraped."

*Cinderella* : " Just look at that tobaccy ash ! And I cleaned you up so pretty before luncheon."

We can easily see what good friends Bodie and the little drudge are, it is that queer friendship elderly men have tor little servants, who clean the front steps while the wind whistles along the street, who have no home yet so often seem to see that Eternal Home so many of us never see, who drift along life's highway with none to know whence they came or whither they go, yet these little servants are perhaps the best of all the vast mass called humanity.

Cinderella has a great wish to go to a ball, she has a great wish to go to Buckingham Palace, she wonders how the police may be dodged. The policeman who is hiding in Mr. Bodie's cupboard happens to hear this, and it being war time, we are not surprised that he fails to understand the romantic motive behind Cinderella's desire to dodge the police guardians of the King's Palace. In fact it is of course his duty

to take particulars of where Cinderella has been lately and what she has been doing. We have a shrewd idea that all the time Barrie is satirising the police, but if so we will forgive him, as who would not be better for knowing Mr. Bodie's charming little servant ? The policeman cannot find anything definite against her, but he is determined to keep her in view, in case anything should warrant an arrest. So we come to the end of the first act, with Cinderella off on a mysterious errand.

We have got to like the policeman very much by the end of the first act, he is a very human fellow really, in fact we like him so much that we have come with him into the atmosphere of the second act. It is a poor street in London. One of those streets that look so alike, the name is the only indication that they are different one from the other. It is a profound mistake to deplore the drabness of London's streets, there is nothing drab in a street that has a hundred homes, that has a hundred mothers, that has a hundred fathers, that has a hundred fat chubby babies, it is far more beautiful than the streets with a hundred huge houses, with a hundred mothers who never look after their babies, with a hundred bored society people, who have long forgotten that life is worth living.

" Our policeman appears in the street, not perhaps for the first time this evening, and flashes his lantern on the suspect's window, whose signboard we now see bears

this odd device. *Celeste et Cie.* The Penny Friend."

It is in this queer emporium that we find Cinderella doing all sorts of jobs for sum of a penny each.

For a penny you can have your coat measured, or your beard shaved, or your domestic and matrimonial difficulties enquired into. There is a delightful and far-seeing passage of words between Cinderella and a woman who doesn't wish it to be known, that her husband keeps her because the law insists that he shall do so. It gives an insight into that curious quality which we call pride. For undoubtedly more often than not pride is a virtue, even when it seems to be but mere obstinacy.

*Marion* : " They say there's a man comes to see me at times though he has a wife at Hoxton."

*Cinderella* : <sup>11</sup> " I've heard."

*Marion* : " So I'm being turned out."

*Cinderella* : " I don't think it's a case for me."

*Marion* : " Yes, it is."

*Cinderella* : " Are you terrible fond of him ?"

*Marion* : " Fond of him ! Damn him ! Cinders, they've got the story wrong ; it's me as is his wife ; I was married to him in a church. He met that woman long after and took up with her."

*Cinderella* : " What ! Then why do you not tell me the truth ? "

*Marion* : " It's my pride keeps me from telling. I would rather be thought to be the wrong'un he likes than the wife the law makes him—help."

*Cinderella* : "Is that pride ? "

*Marion* : " It's all the pride that's left to me."

*Cinderella* : " I'm awfully sorry for you, but I can't think of no advice to give you."

*Marion* : " It's not advice I want."

*Cinderella* : " What is it then ? "

*Marion* : " It's pity. I fling back all the gutter words they fling at me, but my heart, Cinders, is wet at times. It's wet for one to pity me."

*Cinderella* : " I pity you."

*Marion* : " You'll tell nobody ? "

*Cinderella* : "No."

Then the policeman, coming in to have his beard shaved, is discovered by Cinderella. He further discovers that this sort of penny Emporium is her "bit" for the war. It is Cinderella's ambition to attend a ball, as her fairy antetype did when we were quite young. Cinderella has an idea the fairy prince is on the way to carry her off to the Royal Ball and going to the door to look for him, falls asleep and dreams that she really is at the long hoped for ball. Of course what has really happened is that hard work, little food, have done their worst, and Cinderella on the doorstep is near to the sleep from which none awake, though we

implore, though we curse, though we pray, though we weep, that sleep which comes suddenly to the worldly woman, like a drawn out agony to the woman of the streets, like a flash to the soldier shot in battle, with gentleness to those who have lived long and lived nobly. This is how we find Cinderella at the end of this second act.

"It is no longer a ballroom on which the lantern sheds this feeble ray, is the street outside Cinderella's door, a white street now, silent in snow. The child in her rags, the policeman's scarf still round her precious feet, is asleep on the doorstep, very little life left in her, very little oil left in the lantern."

The third act finds Cinderella in a house near the sea, under the charge of one, Dr. Bodie, a typical woman doctor, the kind of person to avoid. For of all the grotesque monstrosities that has come to be the part of our modern life, perhaps the woman doctor is the worst. Entirely unwanted, with very little womanly feeling, hatefully masculine, the woman doctor bullies her nurses, is irritable with her patients, offensive in manner and is altogether a thoroughly offensive person. Lest it be said that I am unfair, let me add that the reason women doctors *are* a failure, is that the combination of "woman" and "doctor," is detrimental to both states. Dr. Bodie true to

her type (though Barrie tells us " is a very ladylike person "), is at the same time an odious creature. This third act is one of the poorest Barrie has ever written and he has unfortunately made a rather stupid joke about a soldier and the matching of his glass eyes. Of course the policeman visits Cinderella at this home by the sea, of course Cinderella is made love to, of course they agree to " fix it up " and so Cinderella gets her kiss, after having nearly died in her efforts to attend a swell ball, the type of ball the bored society girl and her thin lipped mother attend every night of the season, so that some ogling swain with a small brain and a large bank balance may be bought.

It is not difficult to discover an obvious meaning in this strange play, but it may not be the one meant to be shown by Barrie. I think then, the obvious meaning to be found, is that romance lurks in the mind of the most unimportant drudge. All through the play, we feel that Cinderella sees visions, she sees the fairy prince, she imagines the coach taking her to the ball, she ponders over the possibility of even seeing the king. In many ways Barrie has not conceived a more delightful character than this little drudge, she is capable, she is kindly, she has humour, she might even be a Dickens character. Yet it must be said that in some way, this play fails.

It fails because Barrie made the mistake of making the play a " period " one, its interest is decreased by the fact that it is in a limited

sense a war play. And it is with the end of the second act that I find the greatest fault. It was entirely unnecessary to have gone beyond the fact that Cinderella falls into a dream, in which she dreamed she was at the long wished for ball. We did not need to follow the details of her dream. In writing this part of his play, as a sort of war satire. Barrie entirely ruined the second act, which up to a point is some of his best work.

The whole thing is forced, to make the fairy god-mother a member of the Red Cross, is merely to tell us, that Barrie when he wrote this play, was possessed of war fever and he is far too great a playwright to be pardoned easily for falling into "topicality." And why on earth the king should have spoken, with a cockney accent, is quite extraordinary. The whole of the satirical part of the second act and the whole of the third act, have this distinction, they are the worst writing Barrie has ever done, they would not be worthy of a mediocre playwright, they would put a good novelist to shame. Though of course the third act could not have been left out, the play would have gone on perfectly well, if Barrie hadn't suddenly turned Cinderella's dream into poor and heavy satire.

Mr. Bodie himself is a typical artist and no more need be said, the policeman is just like the one who flashes a lamp in my basement window and tells me when I want to find a street that I am rapidly coming away from it.

There is possibly nothing so fatal, as to

attempt to satirise a fairy tale for a fairy tale cannot be laughed at, any more than we dare laugh at a religious ceremony. For this reason, Barrie has failed to make "A Kiss for Cinderella" as good a play as it deserved to be. With a first act, among his most charming writings, with a promising second act, Barrie with appalling suddenness, falls into cheap and amateurish satire and the play has lost its golden light.

But we shall forget the foolishness of the Red Cross fairy god-mother, we shall pretend not to hear the cockney trumperies of the king, instead we will think of little Cinderella the drudge, we shall think of her pure soul, we shall know that it is the kitchen which breeds romance, we shall be sure the Prince Charming is not too grand to come for a little servant girl. And when we are sickened with the superficialities of modern life, with its feminine snobs and masculine puppies, with powdered mannequins, with the glare of lighted streets, we will sit by the fire and dream that Cinderella is not far off, and when she comes (though she be but the little maid from downstairs), we shall kiss her and, if we are blamed, we can only say that Barrie has made us do this bold thing.

## *Chapter Eight*

### BARRIE AND HIS WAR PLAYS

**I**N common with all writers, during the war, Barrie turned his attention to the writing of what we may call war plays. Nothing, perhaps so indicates the vast influence of that conflict, than that a writer of the type of Barrie should have been so seized by war fever that he wrote plays that were entirely topical, totally temporary and certainly different to anything Barrie had yet done. The great interest lies not so much in the plays, as in the spectacle of this wonderful playwright, caught by the emotion of war, rent by the daily tragedy all round him, immersed in the affairs of the moment, steeped in new light caused by the clash of vast armies. It would of course be ridiculous to see anything in these plays that was in the least lasting, as the war produced the birth of war literature, so very largely peace when it came, caused the death of the same. But it would be quite impossible to ignore those plays Barrie wrote during the war. Though war literature is but a pandering to a vivid emotion, Barrie is quite

incomplete if we forget the little plays he produced during the horrible and insane progress of the war. For say what we may, war is the most abominable, the most atrocious, the most diabolical method of settling a quarrel, all the phantastic brutality of man has yet conceived. And the Great War did but two things, it smashed men's bodies and, what was far more vital, it killed their souls. That we have recovered merely demonstrates that man may count as his greatest gift the power to forget, and it is unfair to call this forgetfulness but callous indifference.

In this chapter I shall deal with five of Barrie's war plays, they are really "incidental," they deal with situations which the war made, they have no claim to any special originality, there is no need to suppose they have any permanent value, yet no book which attempts, as this one does, to discover the mind of Barrie would dare to dismiss them as unworthy of record. I shall consider each of these five plays separately.

(a)

*The Old Lady Shows Her Medals*

Perhaps in this delightful little play, we get at the mind of the average woman more completely than in any of the more famous and longer plays Barrie has written. For the whole progress of the play turns on the instinct of

motherhood. It is fashionable in our day for women, especially those who have ruined our universities, to scoff at the idea of motherhood, the result is that these "women" are quite useless to the state, wholly unnatural, entirely loveless and of the nature of people most likely to bring ruin to the world. But, fortunately, the university unsexed person is but a minority and the majority of women still value mother love above all else.

In the play we are writing of, we have three old ladies and a criminal. The criminal, Mrs. Dowey; has committed the awful crime of pretending she has a son at the front, so that she can write letters to somebody, that she can knit socks for somebody, that she can dread the sound of the telegraph boy's knock. The other old ladies, all charladies, merely make up the setting, for let it be known our criminal is a charwoman. It so happens that Mrs. Dowey's pretended son comes on leave and decides to visit his "mother."<sup>17</sup> This he does and is at first inclined to be somewhat annoyed that he has been the victim of a ruse. But, by the end of Private Dowey's leave, all is made up and the gallant highlander is content that Mrs. Dowey shall be his new found "mother."<sup>17</sup>

Private Dowey goes back to the front and is very soon killed. Mrs. Dowey once more is the lonely charlady, with now no one at all to write to even, no more cigarettes to send.

Thus Barrie shows us the old lady a month or two after Kenneth Dowey's death.

" It is early morning and she is having a look at her medals before setting off on the daily round. They are in a drawer, with the scarf covering them, and on the scarf a piece of lavender. First the black frock, which she carries in her arms like a baby. Then her War Savings Certificates, Kenneth's bonnet, a thin packet of real letters and the famous champagne cork. She kisses the letters but she does not blub over them. She strokes the dress, and waggles her head over the certificates and presses the bonnet to her cheeks, and rubs the tinsel of the cork carefully with her apron. She is a tremendous old fun; yet she exults, for she owns all these things, and also the penny flag on her breast. She puts them away in the drawer, the scarf over them, the lavender on the scarf. Her air of triumph well becomes her. She lifts the pail and the mop, and slouches off gamely to the day's toil."

In creating Mrs. Dowey, Barrie gave us a true picture of the charlady and her place in the war. For perhaps we are a little disinclined to realise that romance accompanies the woman who scrubs the steps, while we slumber upstairs. As a particular person, Mrs. Dowey has all the best feminine qualities, she has imagination, she has the art of committing crime, without being really aware of it herself, she must do her bit in the war, though she has no son, she is determined to be a " Mother."

It is really unfortunate that this is a war play, for we could always do with Mrs. Dowey on our English stage, she is so infinitely superior to the creations of to-day. Why must we sit and watch pseudo actresses vacillate between being mannequins and the mistresses of cads, why need we watch women who are merely vampires and men who are merely masculine fops? We would rather watch Mrs. Dowey, we would rather see her and her pail. For it is possible that of all the Barrie characters, the war charlady, is most likely to make us realise, what woman really is, and how hopelessly un-womanlike are those who are born of many modern playwrights.

(b)

*The New Word*

Perhaps one of the most remarkable things the War taught us, was the sudden value of people we had but seldom thought about. The English public, excluding the military and society folk, was inclined to look upon second lieutenants with something bordering on amusement and contempt. They were politely considered to be not of the highest intelligence and of little use to the masses, except that they looked nice and were popular on days of public processions. The truth was that the second lieutenant was scarcely known to the vast

majority of the English. He was seen at Ascot in a top hat, he was seen in the hunting field in pink, he was seen once or twice a year lining the streets while the King passed to the Opening of Parliament or the Queen passed to open a new hospital, once a year at the manoeuvres the public suddenly realised that second lieutenants were soldiers.

But with the war came a sudden and horrid awakening, the second lieutenant became someone who stood between us and the Germans, he suddenly became the symbol for sacrifice, he suddenly became death's most easy prey, his body became a target, his soul grew suddenly white, the manhood of England that emanated from the public schools and universities became the boy soldiers, the leaders of men, the wonder of the world, the second lieutenants.

And Barrie writes in this little play of the conversation in a family which has as one of its members, he who has become for England, the great, young, noble, daring second lieutenant. There is of course nothing striking in the play except for certain cleverness in the dialogue, any self-respecting playwright could have constructed *The New Word*. There is nothing more in it than the conversation between a proud father and his rather self-conscious son. It need not be repeated, for in any home that this book goes, the readers if they be father or mother, will know well enough of what nature the conversation will be.

(c)

*Barbara's Wedding*

One of the most pathetic pictures is that which has as its scene an old man, whose brain has left him, with but power to live in the past. In *Barbara's Wedding*, a charming play in a war setting, we have Barrie's exquisitely drawn portrait of an old Colonel who knows nothing about the terrible conflict that has swept Europe as a scythe sweeps the tall green grass. The old Colonel knows nothing of the daily slaughter, so daily that we almost grew accustomed to it, the village green has lost its cricketers and the poor old Colonel cannot imagine where they are, alas some will never, never play cricket again. And all the time it seems to the Colonel that it is Barbara's wedding day.

Thus the Colonel's wife tells the old man, that there is a terrible war on, such a war as he could never have imagined. The delicate charm of this devoted old lady is one of the great points of Barrie's war plays. Her gentleness is that gentleness that only the old possess, her love for the gallant old Colonel, whose mind has become clouded, is that love that only those who have spent a long life together, ever know. So with infinite charm she tells the old warrior of the war.

*Colonel's wife* : " Sit down dear and I will tell you something. It is nothing to trouble you, because your soldiering is done John, and greatly done. My dear, there is war

again and our old land is in it. Such a war as my soldier never knew."

*Colonel* : " A war ! That's it, is it ? So now I know. Why wasn't I told ? Why haven't I my marching orders ? I am not too old yet."

One of the most pathetic passages is that one in which the Colonel suddenly realises that Billy boy is dead, one of those young men, we sent so gaily to the front, while at home, our clergy talked of the glory of the war and many of our women went to the theatres, where to their everlasting shame, actors and actresses, dared to caricature these young men, that some new and topical quip might delight the respectable patrons of the stalls.

*Colonel's wife* : " It is a long time since we had a gardener, John."

*Colonel* : " Is it ? So it is ! That is why there is no more cricket on the green."

*Colonel's wife* : " They have all gone to the war, John."

*Colonel* : " That's it ; even the little shavers." (He whispers) " Why isn't Billy boy fighting, Ellen ? "

*Colonel's wife* : " Oh John ! "

*Colonel*; " Is Billy boy dead ? " (She nods). " Was he killed in action ? " (She nods again). " Good for Billy boy. I knew Billy boy was all right. Don't cry, Ellen. I will take care of you. All's well with Billy boy."

Indeed we may echo with the Colonel, of those hundred thousand youths who lie away in the fields of fair France, " it is well with the child, it is well."

At the end of this little play, which is Barrie at his very best, we find the Colonel has once more forgotten the present and has remembered the past. He wishes that his wife may read to him.

*Colonel's wife* : (she gets from the shelf the best book for war time) : " Which bit shall I read ? "

*Colonel* : " About Mr. Pickwick going into the lady's bedroom by mistake."

*Colonel's wife* : " Yes, dear, though you almost know it by heart. You see, you have begun to laugh already."

*Colonel* : " You are laughing too, Ellen, I can't help it."

(She begins to read; they are both chuckling).

(d)

### *A Well Remembered Voice*

No creed or theory of religious value received such strength as did Spiritualism during the war. The spectacle of the deaths of thousands upon thousands of young men produced an interest in the next life that nothing short of actual appearances could satisfy. With their worn dogmas, the Churches did but little to satisfy this craving, vague promises of a mystic

communion between the departed and the living, by means of a sacrament, only intelligible to those who accepted it by Faith, appealed only to a minority. Those who had prior to the war thought little of anything save life here suddenly were forced to consider the possibility or otherwise of life beyond the grave. It was then to be expected that Spiritualism, which seemed to give certain hope of a life in another world, would be welcomed with a warmth never before perhaps awarded to any religion, except in the first few years, when Christianity spread over the West like a sandstorm, smothering all with its new and seemingly satisfying doctrines.

Whether of course Spiritualism is a legitimate way of attempting to solve the mystery of the Unseen is a matter of opinion, the undoubted fact does remain, that as a Science and as a Religion, it requires the most searching investigation; before it can be pronounced true or false, it needs to be stripped of its rather trumpery nature which at present invades so much of Psychic Research. Spiritualism should be treated reverently, not as a sort of after tea amusement, when in certain clubs, on the payment of a shilling or so, spirits are claimed to be raised, so that they shall be made use of, before their patrons depart to the theatre or to the nearest restaurant. To deny that there is any truth in Spiritualism is as futile as it is superficial, for to deny that which we are trying to prove is as illogical as dogmatising upon matters at present unproven.

The peculiar interest of the play we are writing about, lies in the fact that it is about Spiritualism and it therefore gives us some idea of what Barrie thinks of this curious aftermath of the war. The scene of the play is a seance in which a mother attempts to get into communication with her son who has been killed in action. It cannot be said that she derives very much satisfaction, there seems nothing to suggest that she has established communication with her dead son, The real point of the play, is that the son makes a spontaneous appearance to his rather sceptical father. The conversation between the two is so natural that we are bound to think that Barrie thinks this kind of spontaneous appearance is reasonable. The one injunction the son insists on is that his father shall be bright, for apparently those in the next world are worried if we grieve. The actual attempts by the mother to get into touch with her son by means of table turning and other Spiritualistic methods seem to have failed, for the son on being asked by his father admits that he has received no messages. Thus it really seems as if Barrie believes that Spirits appear to us, but by their wish and not by ours. Again whether he is right is an open question, assuming that Barrie does mean this by his play. But from all we have ever read of the nature of spirit, it does seem more probable, that any move of communication is more likely to come from them, than that they should come upon our direction and command. For it is really

a dreadful thought, that those who have passed on can be summoned at will, for they may then easily be summoned for the most trifling reasons.

(e)

*Der Tag*

A subject indeed that a master pen should write of. The dream of the Emperor of Germany that he had not made war. A dream that Belgium had been left in her glorious unworldliness, that France should have been able to be at peace, England to flourish in her place in the midst of the seas.

Then the awakening of the Emperor with his great nation beaten, his wonderful armies but moving shadows, his women widows, his house fallen as no royal house had ever before fallen. Such is the Barrie interpretation of the world tragedy, the most disgraceful war that ever blackened history, the war for which God must have wept and with far more bitter tears than the weeping over Jerusalem. Who is there who does not weep for the awful mistake the Emperor of the Germans made when he declared war? Who dares to judge the mind of a man who saw world domination? Who dares to talk now of the glory of war? Only those whose proper place is the dustheap, only those who made fortunes from

the years that destroyed an Emperor and slew a generation, only those who are so young that they know not what war is, only those whose eyes are blind, whose ears are stopped, whose minds are diseased.

## *Chapter Nine*

### TWO MORE PLAYS

**B**ETWEEN the writing of "The Professor's Love Story " and " Mary Rose " elapsed a period of a quarter of a century. If a man writes a good play at the beginning of a span of twenty-five years and at the end writes a wonderful play, his dramatic evolution may truly be said to be not only progressive, but highly favoured by the gods. For let it be said that twenty-five years is a horribly long time, it is long enough to turn the new born infant from a pewking mass of red substance to a sprawling mass of cynical humanity at the age of twenty-five, it can again turn cynical and enthusiastic youth (the two are complementary) into middle age respectability, that has the suburban outlook, once again may it lead from middle age to the tolling of the Church Bell and the quarter column in the local paper. But in the twenty-five years that elapsed between " The Professor's Love Story " and " Mary Rose," Barrie may be said to have grown younger, as year by year he grew older. And if a man grows younger as the

years advance, then truly may he be said to have found success in life if not in the world.

For what is it that keeps a man young ? It is not that he finds life easy, it is not that wealth and fame come his way, it is not that he necessarily avoids the unpleasant side of life, it is rather that he sees that the basic principle of life is that it is a thing worth while. So many modern men and women (and especially the latter) can find nothing tangible in life at all, they wish for this, they pine for that, they must rush from amusement to amusement, even time for sleep is grudged, life appears but a succession of sensations and they find none to guide them along its curious and hesitating paths. For unless we can look upon life as something as much worth while, when we are nearing its end, as when it had but scarcely begun, we may as well admit that it is a horrid blasphemy. For if the soul grows old with the ageing of the body, the spirit is warped and unable to shine forth with the power that is its birthright. With the case of Barrie I have said that he grows younger as the years advance, it is so, for no man who did not, could consistently write better plays year after year. For " Mary Rose " is not of this world at all really, it is an echo from that half forgotten world that exists in the nursery, that is peopled by tin soldiers (but not only that), is populated with fairies and the soft rustlings that men call in despair but day dreams.

It is but paying the highest compliment to Barrie to say that no one else but he could

possibly be conceived as the author of this lovely phantasy. In "Mary Rose" there are all the elements which go to the making of a pure and lovable drama. There is the suggestion of the eternal mystery of islands, the horrid feeling that Mary is lost and yet in some remarkable way is not lost, her curious state of not growing older in outlook while her contemporaries do is one of those contingencies that may drive men to find refuge in a lunatic asylum.

We cannot realise from *actual* fact what would be our feelings if we did not age while those about us did, but in "Mary Rose" Barrie gives us a pretty good idea of what such a procedure would be like. There are of course critics who see in "Mary Rose" but the working out of a symbolism. Though it would be absurd to apply a test of a rigid realism to Mary Rose, at the same time I do not see why, with certain reservations, Mary Rose should not be a character. That her actual loss on the island and her subsequent appearance so many years after are but symbolism is of course reasonable enough, but stripped of her environment and some of her attributes, she could quite well be based on human nature.

For undoubtedly there are women who do spread around themselves islands, islands of solitude, they do dwell quite lost to the world, they are so unworldly, that we might easily conceive of them as being almost unhuman. And of course Mary Rose is very largely unhuman, but I say this is not the same thing as

calling her a symbol, for a symbol is not a peculiar example of a general rule but a picture representing a completely different object. Mary Rose is a peculiar and extremely rare type, but she can be found in life, she herself is not a symbol but her surroundings in Barrie's plays are symbolistic.

For matter of that Mary Rose might have been lost not on an island in the Scotch seas but on an "island" in Piccadilly and it would not have affected the beautiful idea that she did not grow old in spirit, or the terrible melancholy of it. For if Barrie has given us in "Mary Rose" one of his most beautiful plays, he has also given us one of his most melancholy. It may be, if we think superficially, a melancholy thing to grow old, but it would be more than mere melancholy that we should remain young while those we knew mattered most to us slipped away into the vast mystery of that age which has the grey hair and the wrinkled skin, the calm outlook and the sweet sympathy that only the old really possess. For in many ways old age is more beautiful than even childhood. And this is perhaps one point Barrie has never made much of. Even in "Mary Rose" he seems to miss it, for though it is in its way a beautiful idea how Mary Rose clings to the fresh innocence of childhood, it is a possibility that as an old woman her delightful spirit might have been even more delicate and even more sympathetic.

But of course the essence of the play is that though Mary Rose attains to womanhood and

motherhood, at heart she is but a child, it is a beautiful way of saying that our innocent childhood can remain while the years sweep on. The tragedy is, that in real life, such a state is so seldom met with, that it becomes almost lost sight of. In fact, it may be that this seeming impossibility of the retention of childish ideas through so many years, and through the experiences of marriage and motherhood, has made so many see Mary Rose as but a symbol, when she may quite well be one of those unique mortal "fairies,"<sup>11</sup> who pass through this world almost unknown and unseen, so utterly unworldly are they.

. . . . .

" Mary Rose is then when all is said and done, a tragedy. It is a tragedy because it demonstrates all too clearly that contact with the world necessarily makes us old, in years it matters not, but old in outlook, when the word " old " does not denote sympathy, understanding and charm, but bitterness or unsatisfied resignation. Thus Barrie does make us realise that the reason that Mary Rose retains so much of her childish innocence, is that she is lost on an island, in other words she is kept from harsh contact with the world. The thought is really tragic, but it is not hopeless, for there are in the world Mary Roses who without losing themselves on islands do manage to keep a fair portion of their child-like purity. But they are so few and far between, that their presence makes too little mark on the

cold cynical world. Perhaps Mary Rose and Margaret Dearth are like those people who pass by in the night, who leave us with an indefinite longing, who " might have been." For there are moments when we all feel we might have been, that we might retain the outlook of Mary Rose or the charming enthusiasm of Margaret Dearth, that character in " Dear Brutus " which does symbolise vain longings.

If we turn from " Mary Rose " back to " The Professor's Love Story " we really travel from mysticism and mystery to good natured satire blended with a delightful atmosphere of Scottish environment. Perhaps with the exception of the clergyman no character so lends itself to stage satire as that of the professor, the professor so commonly depicted as immersed in Greek particles or geometrical theorems, too absorbed to be aware of the passage of everyday events.

" The Professor's Love Story " is a play that deals more with Scottish country life than any of Barrie's others if we except the first act of " What Every Woman Knows." It is of course a little to be deplored that Barrie fell into the trap of making his professor so absent-minded that we scarcely can imagine him anything more than an exaggerated picture of the professorial type. For though professors are caught twixt new adverbs and old planets, it is a little ridiculous to say, as Barrie does in this play, that an old professor can be quite violently in love, and not only not know the lady, but fail to

realise that the disturbing symptoms are not due to indigestion but to love.

For the whole play though it has of course charming passages (and what *Barrie* play has not) is a little forced and cheap. It is almost farce without having the merit of being meant to be that. Of course the play strikes the popular imagination as love between two totally different mortals always will.

It is a vast distance both in time and structure between the two plays dealt with in this chapter, yet in both we have the *Barrie* charm, the *Barrie* melancholy, the *Barrie* sympathy. At this stage more need not be said, as the general trend of *Barrie's* philosophy will be dealt with in a later chapter.

. . . . .

The curtain has fallen on the first act, the fairies and mortals lurk in the shadows, there is all round a great hush, but it is not the hush that denotes the end, it is but the hush that signals that the curtain is about to rise on the second act.

END OF PART ONE

## PART II

### *Chapter Ten*

#### THE EVERLASTING CHARM OF PETER PAN

**I**N dealing with the immortal Peter Pan, by which Barrie has for all time established himself as the child's good fairy, we must discuss the old problem whether a book loses or gains by being dramatised. It really depends upon the book, it is unsafe to lay down any general rule. The rules of the theatre more often than not demand totally different treatment to the writing of a book. An ordinary novel which is dramatised quite often seems to suffer by the process, the dialogue has to be considerably shortened, the scenery or background of the novel cannot be pictured on the stage with the detail that it might seem to demand. On the other hand, the characters in a novel can be made more real when dramatised, than they could ever hope to be between the covers of a book. For on the stage we do not "see" the characters by an act of imagination, but by actual experienced sight. But the real and essential difficulty seems to be in the converting of a novel written in chapters to a play written in acts. In a novel of perhaps thirty chapters, it

is not easy to turn that into a play of three acts, for in each act there must be, more or less, the essential parts of ten chapters. The reason that so many excellent novels make but poor plays is not that they lack characterisation, but that the dividing of episodes has to undergo such violent process.

To proceed to a still more popular form of novel adaptation, that of the film, does the same criticism apply ?

Not to the same extent, Whereas the scenery question suffers in stage dramatisation, on the film it can receive the greatest impetus. In a novel we may say the hero decides to walk four miles to the nearest town. In the original novel we follow him in imagination (if the novelist is a good descriptive writer), along the country road that leads to the town. We can " see " him as he breasts the hill, we can " see " him as he chats to the old ploughman, we can " see " him as he lifts his hat to the squire's daughter.

But when the scene of the walk comes under the process of dramatisation, we can only actually see the hero start, out on his walk to the distant town. Of course a scene may show us him, on the road there, and we may quite well in a subsequent scene be with him when he arrives at the town. But the succession of events is irregular, must be, it cannot be so ordered as the following of the hero, on his walk of four miles, pictured for us on five or six pages of paper.

But the film in this particular walk can more

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faithfully follow the hero than either the novel or the stage. We can see, not in imagination, but in actuality, every yard of the walk, every step taken, every action indulged in, in fact the only thing we cannot do is to *hear* the foot-steps on the hard road.

Where of course the stage does improve on the novel, is in the matter of speech. For in a novel however much we may use the gift of imagination, it is impossible to hear what the characters have to say, and the actual sound of speech, determines character far more than is usually allowed. For it is not by any means *what* is said that is the key to character, but *how* it is said. Thus by combining the " what " and the " how " the stage can get the whole of a character, while a novel can only get perhaps two-thirds. Again the film suffers the same defect in showing character: speech, as in the original novel, is silent.

Each, the stage and the film, do something to help the novel, yet when all is said and done, many novels are better left as novels and not dramatised or filmed. The greatest care needs to be exercised in the selection of novels for stage or film adaptation, for as the novel can benefit greatly by this, so it can equally suffer by being staged or filmed. Once again the only safe rule is that it depends upon the book. No novel that has not a considerable amount of action is much good for the films. No novel which lacks in clever dialogue can be dramatised successfully. The novel that is a psychological

study is perhaps best left alone, for in such a work we need to ponder, and who can ponder during the passing of a play or a film?—surely but few, the passage is too rapid, we cannot turn back to the page before.

. . . . .

Peter Pan is above everything else a fairy tale, but it is a fairy tale which is totally unlike the usual type of such story. For in Peter Pan, more than in perhaps any other of Barrie's works, we have a combination of mortals and fairies. Peter Pan himself is both a fairy and a mortal, he is like that side of us that comes back with a horrid jar, when we go to a Pantomime, he is like the Creature we know dwelt in the wood at the end of the garden.

The great difference between Peter Pan and other fairy stories is that in the latter the people who come in contact with the fairy are not really mortals at all, they are not surprised when the troll turns the prince into a pig, they take it as a matter of course when the bad fairy turns up at the Christening of the princess and threatens her with terrible penalties because the king has been so tactless as to forget to send her an invitation to the ceremony. In fact the people in the legitimate fairy tales are rather bored, they are almost modern, they see no more wonder in the castle that dwells on the top of a mountain of pure glass, than we see in a train burrowing under the city like a mole under the field.

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Wendy and Michael are two of the most ordinary children possible, they have a certain belief in fairies, they apparently dislike having to go to bed (as all good children do). Their parents on the night of the arrival of Peter Pan have gone to a party and had we been listening we should have heard the jingle of bells as the hansom drove off and there would have been no reason to have imagined them as fairy bells.

It may as well be said at once that " Peter Pan " does not suffer by being dramatised, in fact it really gains, for it is almost impossible to imagine Barrie writing anything that would not do well for the stage. Nothing in recent years has approached the success of " Peter Pan,"<sup>1</sup> in fact Christmas without the boy who wouldn't grow up would now be as strange as Christmas without Father Christmas. For year by year Peter thrills whole multitudes of children, he makes them laugh while their parents would, if no one were looking, cry, he takes them to the old land of mother love, he takes them back, back to the pirate ship and the villainous Captain Hook, the naughty crocodile with the clock in his inside that will keep ticking: why! if we caught that crocodile we couldn't be too cross with him, for he lives in the days of Peter.

Year by year this most lovely play of childish adventure carried out with a deep philosophy transports us to the Never, Never Land, where are all the lost boys.

If a play has the outstanding success that " Peter Pan " has, it is obvious that it must con-

tain something that appeals to successive types of people. For a revival cannot make its appearance year after year unless there is some lasting charm in it that remains constant through a long period, though the outside world changes and customs alter almost daily. It cannot be denied that a very large number of plays are successful simply because they are topical, because they give a picture of society as it is constructed at the moment. Satire to-day is very largely also topical, it is courting disaster to satirise something that occurred in the last generation. It is of course true that some outstanding plays of a satirical nature concerned with habits of years ago, may run for a short period, but they are but few and far between.

But with "Peter Pan" the reason of its extraordinary success, is that it deals with a theme that is everlastingly charming. Childhood and its curious philosophy of acceptance of what it is told never loses its fresh delight- We are constantly being told that children are different to what they were thirty years ago, if they are, then they are not children but miserable caricatures. The boy who hates tin soldiers will probably grow up to be either a prime minister or a thief, for either of these states is abnormal and the boy who does not love tin soldiers has started life in an abnormal way. The girl who hates dolls is abnormal and likely to be but a gross caricature of the best attributes of her sex. "Peter Pan" deals with the ordinary child at its very best, it deals with that remark-

able love of adventure that children have, when they imagine the fairy king is in the nursery cupboard and that the way to fairyland lies through the wood at the end of the drive. For Wendy and Michael have known all along that they were destined for a great adventure and it is connected with the boy who flies in at the window, the boy who will not grow up, the boy who has with him the naughty Tinker Bell, who can be very charming, but who can when she is aroused, be exceedingly disagreeable.

One very good reason then for the enormous success of " Peter Pan " is that it is a charming picture of the child's mind, for nearly all children in their imagination go through the strange adventures that Wendy and Michael do. What child does not long to sail on a fairy lagoon, what child does not believe that there are Pirates far away over the blue sea, what child has not some idea of the Never, Never Land where are all the world's lost boys? " Peter Pan " is not only a play it is a religion, it is, in a pictorial way, the portrait of childish faith, that faith which sees in fairies something that is eternally beautiful and eternally just out of sight.

It is of course a mistake to imagine that in *every* way Peter Pan is a lovable character. He is not, he is at times selfish, his very wish not to grow up, has a certain suggestion of selfishness in it. But if so it merely indicates that Barrie does understand the child's mind, for children are selfish, but in a different way to grown ups,

children are selfish without being aware of the fact, grown ups are always entirely aware of it. Some critics have seen in "Peter Pan" an attempt to show what happiness really is, the power to fly, the power to race over the church steeples, the power to soar over the ocean. I do not agree with those critics who only see in "Peter Pan" the embodiment of happiness. If one reads the character of Peter Pan at all carefully, it can be seen that he has a certain wistfulness about him, which is akin to melancholy.

For the whole essence of Peter Pan is melancholy, it is the symbol of a striving against the inevitable, a striving not to grow up that we all really wish, though we pretend that we would on no account be children again. Peter's wish not to grow up is that he shall not reach that stage that he can longer fly. For grown ups cannot fly, they have not faith that they can, that is reserved for little children.

It is one of the most extraordinary things that we always want to be something other than what we are. The child wishes to be grown up that he may sit up to supper, the grown up wishes to be a child again, for he fondly imagines that he would, on growing up again, be so different, so much better, so much more successful, so much more useful. Barrie effectively dispels this idea in "Dear Brutus." But it does not explain the almost universal desire there is instilled in humanity to be different from what they are.

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In a sense Peter Pan wants to be something else to what he is, he very much wants a mother, yet he wants to remain at the same time as he is. To a limited extent then Peter Pan is symbolic of humanity's strivings.

I do not think that most children really understand the true significance of "Peter Pan," they look upon it as a delightful fairy story, about a boy who refuses to grow up and has delightful adventures and hairbreadth escapes. It is for the older folk to see the symbolism and philosophy that lies behind, the pathos of Peter, the utter sadness of the Never, Never Land, for there are so many who are always there in our prisons and lunatic asylums, the whimsical charm of Tinker Bell. One of the most poignant incidents in Peter Pan is that one who, "Tinker Bell to save Peter has drunk poison. The only thing that can save Tinker Bell is if the children say they believe in fairies, and if they do they must clap.

And so every Christmas in the heart of London, the children in the audience of a West End theatre clap to proclaim that they believe in fairies. And perhaps, almost unconsciously some of their parents clap also. It is the secret of the charm of "Peter Pan,"<sup>1</sup> the beautiful child's world of the fairy, so far removed from the cold, commercial and bitter world that has long lost fairyland because it has long lost its childlike innocence.

## *Chapter Eleven*

### THE SENTIMENTALITY OF THE LITTLE MINISTER

"**T**HE Little Minister " is one of those books which just escapes being futile and the reason that it escapes such a fate, is to be found in the fact that its writer happened to be a genius. There is no word which is more difficult to explain than genius, it is even more complex than the attempt to define what greatness really is. In his study of Dickens Mr. Chesterton has an admirable discussion on the word great and perhaps the conclusion is that greatness is a moral quality and therefore likely enough to be overlooked by the world. Genius and greatness may be complementary and they may on the other hand be directly opposed. One of the most popular mistakes is that one which talks airily about a man being a great genius. There is no need to qualify genius, it is or it is not, there is no such thing as small genius or great genius or moderate genius or beautiful genius but there is something which can be rightly described genius. Again because a man is a genius is no good reason for (ipso facto) describing him as great. A genius may be a very

small man, the cases of Oscar Wilde or Byron are examples, both of the category of genius yet both small men, because true manliness to either was a stranger. Can genius then be defined? Perhaps it may be described as the attribute which marks out one man from his contemporaries and gives him a unique place. In my book on Mr. Chesterton I said that as a writer he was unique, it would have been really the same to have said he was a genius.

It is rather a popular idea that genius is apt to be neglected, that the genius is likely to starve in a garret in Bloomsbury while the commonplace man slides by in a Rolls Royce on his way from King's Cross to Mayfair. Such an argument being popular is necessarily futile, for popular arguments are usually futile, and the more futile they are the more popular must we expect them to be.

For the men and women who in the wordly sense rise to the heights which is the true destiny of genius are of that nature and to say that they are neglected is ridiculous. To-day those who may be described as possessing genius have risen from absolute obscurity, if genius was always unrecognised Arnold Bennett might still be away in the Black Country, Wells might still be selling wares in a Bromley shop, Ramsey MacDonald might still be a pettifogging schoolmaster, the subject of this book might still be hawking newspaper articles round Nottingham. Genius is a quality that cannot be finally suppressed, it may grow slowly, it may be for a time over-

shadowed by superficial brilliance, for a time it may pass down the street and none lift their hats as it passes, but it must come to the front, it must climb to the highest pinnacle, it cannot die without living strenuously for it is a gift of God given to the few for the welfare and edification of the many.

Without doubt "The Little Minister" in spite of its narrow escape from banality has the mark of genius. For a book that can sail as near the rocks of futility and yet not be destroyed, as does the Little Minister, is really a work of genius. For the genius of Barrie has rescued the tale from the mere melodramatic to a sentimentality that has in it much of beauty. It is of course usual to look upon sentimentality as in the nature of something that is rather cheap, most of our popular fiction which lives between yellow covers and has its home on the station bookstalls is but sentimental stuff so execrable as to be scarcely worth the printing.

The horrible sentimentality of Miss Dell is only equalled by the appalling priggishness of her characters, the banality of Charles Garvice was so remarkable that its mawkishness was often overlooked. But it is a mistake to look upon sentimentality as *essentially* unpleasing, there are degrees of it, there is bad sentimentality there is good sentimentality. For the Little Minister is a sentimental character but he is a good sentimental person. He is sentimental not because he is weak or effeminate but because he feels very deeply, he is conscious of his high

calling as a minister, he is conscious directly he meets the Egyptian woman that he has met someone cleverer than himself, who at any rate at first, regards him as a pleasant little nincompoop, but then Lady Babbie would probably think all ministers great or little of the nincompoop persuasion.

In "The Little Minister" Barrie has made it quite evident that he agrees with those who consider that women look upon ministers either as nincompoops or heroes. It is more or less a fact that they do so. The worldly woman looks upon a clergyman as a sort of prig who preaches on Sundays and makes stupid dinner table jokes on weekdays, the unworldly woman who usually wears a crucifix and looks disagreeable, looks upon the clergyman as a sort of earthly saint and is therefore surprised when she learns from the daily press that he is so human, that he has found his way to the police court. As a matter of fact the conceptions of both the worldly woman and the unworldly woman of the clergyman are untrue, the average minister (and he is a clergyman even if he does not become so by the hand of a bishop) is a respectable member of society who treats of heaven and hell professionally so that the amateurs who listen to him, may not lose the way. The Little Minister is typical of the man with or without a clerical collar who is all right as long as a pretty woman does not cross his path, and pass it so effectively that she makes violent and perhaps unwished for inroads on his heart.

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Until he met the Egyptian woman Gavin Dishart is pre-eminently a Scotch minister, austere, enthusiastic, living quite properly with his mother, visiting the sick, arguing with Atheists and preaching to the elect on Sundays. But with the coming of Lady Babbie the Little Minister deteriorates so horribly as actually to walk late at night with the bewitching lady.

When the Little Minister loses his heart he loses his sense also. I have suggested at the beginning of this chapter that Barrie has just succeeded in rescuing this story from futility. The reason he does this is not that he makes the actual story anything more than extremely commonplace, it is in the actual telling of it, that is brought out that insistence on the beautiful that is <sup>^</sup>o large a part of the charm of Barrie. Yet the actual story is interesting enough, at times it is mildly exciting, the background is Scotland in its real type, the love interest is sentimental without being offensive, yet the whole thing, detached from the telling, is quite commonplace. For it is a commonplace for a minister to fall in love with a beautiful woman who at one time appears to be a gipsy, then a society woman, and in each part a thorough minx.

When the Little Minister so young comes to the charge of his Kirk, he has a conversation with the old minister who is leaving to spend the few years that are to elapse before the day when he shall pass the way of all flesh. It is a beautiful passage, that demonstrates how pathetic

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are the daily things that happen, which we never know of, because they are in the next village.

It is the moment when the old minister is saying farewell to Gavin Dishart.

" The old minister, once so brave a figure, tottered as he rose to go, and reeled in a dizziness until he had walked a few paces. Gavin went with him to the foot of the manse road ; without his hat as all Thrums knew before bed-time. ' I begin ' Gavin said as they were parting ' where you leave off, and my prayer is that I may walk in your ways.' ' Ah, Mr. Dishart ' the white-haired minister said, with a sigh, ' the world does not progress so quickly as a man grows old. You only begin where I began.'<sup>1</sup> He left Gavin and then, as if the little minister's last words had hurt him, turned and solemnly pointed his staff upward. Such men are the strong nails that keep the world together."

It has been urged and rightly enough that to apply a too rigid test of realism to Barrie's work is putting it to a test that is inclined to be superficial. For so much of Barrie's work is in its very essence mystical, dealing with immortal beings, considering fairies. But " *The Little Minister* " is not in any sense a mystical book. Of this book it is not unfair to ask is the principal character apart from Gavin Dishart really in the least true to life, because there seems little doubt that Barrie thinks she is a person any

of us might meet ? I do not think that it can be said that Lady Babbie is anything more than a mistaken portrait of a silly type of woman. We might find Lady Babbie up to a point, we might find her masquerading as an Egyptian woman, we might not even be surprised to learn that she was a noted social personage. But we should be amazed to find such a type of woman marry Gavin Dishart. For Gavin Dishart in spite of his piety and enthusiasm is a dreadfully dull sort of person and all the time really Lady Babbie seems to have but thinly veiled contempt for Gavin. Yet Barrie makes this woman marry the Little Minister and here is a picture of Babbie as the wife, so different that we should, if we met her in Thrums look at her as though she were a stranger.

Even Barrie admits that Babbie is very different, the change in her is so enormous that no one would ever guess her history. We would go further and suggest that Barrie ruined the book by turning Babbie into a typical minister's wife.

"No one seeing Babbie going to church demurely on Gavin's arm could guess her history. Sometimes I wonder whether the desire to be a gypsy again ever comes over her for a mad hour and whether, if so, Gavin takes such measures to cure her as he threatened in Caddam Wood."

If Barrie had left us with the spectacle of Gavin turned out of his Kirk as he thoroughly

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deserved to be, for folly is far more dangerous and pernicious than actual vice, and Lady Babbie gone for ever, the book might have been reasonable even to those who judged it from a critical realistic standpoint.

But perhaps even more than its failure from the point of view of realism, "The Little Minister" suffers from being too sentimental in parts, for though much is good sentimentality there are passages where the sentimentality becomes wearisome and dull. The remarkable beauty, on the other hand, of some of the book is not to be denied, Gavin's mother is a fine character and it is disappointing to find her son so weak. Of course the Little Minister himself is not vicious, he is merely silly, which is to be much deplored.

There are critics who have considered that this book and the dramatised story from it, are satires. I do not think such a criticism is true. Barrie all through the book seems to like Gavin far too much to satirise him, Lady Babbie does not seem to be drawn satirically.

"The Little Minister" suffers from two defects, it is far too sentimental and the story is unlikely, yet there are such splendid passages in parts that it would be unfair to determine the work, unworthy of Barrie.

## *Chapter Twelve*

### THRUMS

**N**OTHING perhaps makes a place more famous than that it is connected with a famous man and especially is this so if the famous person has attained eminence in the thorny path of literature. Who would go all the way from New York to Stratford-on-Avon if Shakespeare had not chosen to live in the little old town on the Avon, the fact that Marie Corelli also lived there has not a little added to the town's eminence. Thrums delights in a fame that has descended on it through the writings of Barrie. In dealing with Thrums, Barrie started a literary career in the most sensible fashion possible, he wrote about a place he knew. It is of course entering upon a very wide question to ask why so many writers who certainly have potential gifts utterly fail ever to get a line of any description printed. But surely the very fundamental mistake so many writers make is that they leave out altogether the place they know so well, they ignore the village that gave them birth, they ignore the people who watched their slow progress from helpless babyhood to maturity, they ignore the precincts of

the glorious old Church in which they knelt long before their parents lay for ever outside its walls, the old home that they could count the number of bricks of, is ignored. And then these embryo writers are surprised that their manuscripts never become books, that their names are as unknown as the pebbles on the beach, that they write and write and none read. But is this surprising? How can men write of India if they have but travelled to York, how can women write of Brook Street if they have lived in a villa that is like the other hundred in the same road, how can they write of a forest if they have but seen a desert, how can they write of a desert if they have but seen the thickness of trees?

Thus Barrie wrote of what he knew, he wrote of Thrums, of the little Scotch village, of its queer unworldly inhabitants, and when he wrote he looked out on his little world through eyes that were kind and yet were shrewd enough to see that the day would come when men and women tramped to Thrums not because it was different from a hundred other villages but because it was the wee little spot that Barrie wrote of, the little village that held its joys, its sorrows, its sins, its virtues, its small houses that sheltered men till they should rejoin the earth, its tiny kirk that insisted that life did not end at Thrums though some might think it did.

In the books that Barrie has written concerning the village of Thrums, we have a picture of the great writer when he was comparatively

young, both in years and in literature. The general outlook on life in these books is perhaps kinder than the outlook in some of his later plays, there is a freshness that can only come from a mind that has not seen too much of the world. It might then be argued that the Thrums literature is the best Barrie has given us because it was written before long contact with the world had made Barrie at times almost cynical, for undoubtedly there is to be found cynicism of a mild order in plays like "Dear Brutus" and "The Admirable Crichton." But no critic who knew anything about Barrie's later work would be so unwise as to suggest it was inferior to his earlier. There is no particular imagination displayed in the stories about Thrums, we have no indication of the colossal genius that later was to be made manifest in such a play as "Mary Rose," we have on the other hand in certain wistful passages in <sup>1f</sup> "The Little Minister" a certain foreshadowing of the wealth of sympathy Barrie was going to give in his drawing of such characters as Margaret Deearth and Peter Pan. For we can almost imagine Barrie looking at Thrums and, while writing of its ordinary life, seeing far beyond the mystic beauty that was to find expression in his plays.

It may be somewhat of an exaggeration to see in all writers an orderly progression or in other words clear indication in earlier works of what we may expect in subsequent books or plays. But many writers do undoubtedly progress along lines we should expect from a glance at their

early efforts. In the case of Barrie the indication in these early Thrums books is not too easy to discover. Though it is certainly there, it would be a very bold man who, reading "Sentimental Tommy" or "A Window in Thrums," without the strictest care would easily say that Barrie's later work was but a logical development of them. For though as I have said, we can see certain parallelisms in the early and late work of Barrie, there is much in his plays that does not seem to have any counterpart in his books. Naturally we are leaving on one side "The Little Minister" which as a play is but a dramatisation of the book, generally speaking the Thrums literature is in a class by itself. It is exaggerating in the other direction to suggest that the Thrums books might easily have been written by one other than Barrie, for there are touches in these works which indicate clearly enough the Barrie pen. But I do protest against the rather popular idea that none of the Barrie plays in view of his early ventures are a surprise, for to say such a thing is to defend the ridiculous idea that Barrie's war plays have their prototype in Thrums, and even leaving these on one side, I see no suggestion of "Mary Rose<sup>M</sup>" or "Quality Street" in the Thrums literature.

To a certain extent Barrie seems to have suffered from his earlier books the fate of having his later plays compared with them. Such a comparison is a mistake. The best way to criticise the Thrums literature is to look at it apart from any other of Barrie's writings. The

Thrums literature is a true picture of Scottish rural life, Barrie knows it as well as Hardy knows Dorset or Sheila Kaye Smith understands Sussex. Thrums is at times gay, at times austere, it is quite evidently unconcerned as to what the rest of the world thinks of it. These books that Barrie has written of the little village are a monument to the life of the community there. Through Thrums Barrie interprets what rural Scottish life really is, its insistence on a dull kind of religion that does not allow for much questioning or use of the intellect, its almost studied respectability, its spontaneous hospitality, its quaint homeliness. In Thrums Barrie found that outlet for his literary abilities which made as firm a foundation for him, as it was possible for him to desire. Thrums is naturally proud of Barrie and Barrie is naturally proud of Thrums. The two have joined together and none can separate them. From his window in Thrums, Barrie looked out and saw not only the little village but the very mind of its inhabitants and the picture he painted has been given to us in these charming books, which in every sense may be called the Thrums literature.

END OF PART TWO

## PART THREE

### *Chapter Thirteen*

ARE THE BARRIE CHARACTERS UNREAL?

**P**OSSIBLY it may be suggested that the Barrie characters fall into roughly three classes, those which appear in his earlier books, those which appear in his plays, and those characters which are undoubtedly of the fairy order. In this chapter I propose to apply the test of reality to all three classes, for if there is any criticism which is brought against Barrie, it is that many of his characters are quite unreal. But when critics say this, they do not I think, mean quite the same as when they accuse Dickens of exaggeration in such a character as Little Nell. What they do seem to mean is that some of the "mortal" characters drawn by Barrie are likely to be confused with his purely fairy beings. And this adverse criticism seems to be given birth to by the fact that it is often lost sight of that the world of fairy is perhaps the most real of all, because it is concerned with the real side of human nature, the childlike point of view that believes in fairies.

But to consider this question of reality with

regard to such books as those dealing with Thrums. Little time need be spent in answering the question. The characters in the earlier writings of Barrie seem to fulfil the popular test of what is real, that is they seem to be the portraits of people who are quite ordinary.

In applying the test of reality to the mortals of the principal Barrie plays, I should like to make it quite clear that I am not concerned here with whether if the characters *are* unreal it is a good or bad thing, or whether it is a good or bad thing if they *are* real, all I wish to try and discover is whether taking the real in the ordinary sense, these characters can rightly claim to be under that category.

^AlHthrough his writings Barrie seems to have a way of TDoking at mankind as though the dual nature of it was always apparent to him. He appears to see a man or woman as they would appear if we met them in the street and also he seems to gaze into their souls. From this it may be suggested that in some of his characters Barrie is giving us not the outward person but the soul, and accordingly at a superficial glance we may seem to be dealing with the kind of person that seems to be quite unreal, because it is not the kind of person we are used to meeting. For it must be remembered we never meet the soul of a person, we only meet the outward shell, our own inward soul is but gazed upon by our own self.

But apart from this possibility that Barrie draws very largely the inner nature of mankind,

the nature not seen by the casual observer, human nature is so complex that it is unreasonable to set such limits to it, that we can definitely say, such and such a character is quite unreal. It has been very often urged that Crichton is no more a butler than a mosquito is a flea, that he is merely a symbol constructed by Barrie to show that the only proper environment for a butler is the orthodox pantry. Such a criticism which might have been worth consideration fifty years ago, is in this twentieth century not worth any serious notice. For if it was a little marvellous that Crichton should become betrothed to Lady Mary it is not so miraculous as what happens in our public life to-day, when schoolmasters become Prime Ministers and errand boys attain to the highest government offices. To accuse Barrie of having drawn an unreal person in the figure of Crichton is beside the point.

That Crichton was an unusual type of butler is not to be denied but to say that he was unreal is certainly a mistake, for we can never so exactly know what the attributes of a butler are, that we can be quite sure there is a limit beyond which a butler becomes unreal. Barrie made Crichton a unique butler, he made it obvious that butlers were different beings from what we expected, but Crichton was not unreal in the sense that we could never meet his type in life. For though we meet twenty thousand butlers and not find Crichton, the twenty thousand and first butler might easily be more perfect than Barrie's Crichton.

One of the most difficult tendencies that a critic has to attempt to exterminate is that of preconception. Nearly everything that is disappointing is due to preconception, we preconceive God to be just (as a pragmatic value) we are amazed when the government of the world seems to be in the hands of an unjust and tyrannical monster, we preconceive that a horse is naturally a kindly animal and we are surprised when he suddenly bites us on the arm. But more than perhaps any class of person the literary critic suffers from this curse of preconception, he has preconceived ideas of what is good literary style, anything that does not come up to it, he condemns as inferior, he quite forgets that he may have to add a good bit to his already preconceived ideas. It is so when we are dealing with this question of the reality or otherwise of the Barrie characters. We quite easily preconceive what is to our minds real, anything that does not agree with the standard set is put down as unreal. We set an absurd and arbitrary limit to what is real, we have never met anyone like Crichton so we say he is unreal, we have met a woman like Maggie Wylie and quite easily we say here Barrie has drawn a real woman, we cannot judge Barrie's mortals fairly unless we allow that they may be real, although we have never met people like them.

To come to the third class the fairy beings which are in some ways the most delightful of Barrie's creations ; in asking whether they are real we are asking whether they are real not

from the point of view of actual personality (for of course fairies are imaginary) but from the point of view that the symbolism they suggest is real. For it would be quite absurd to say that Peter Pan was a real person, for however much we might wish it, were we to sit for fifty years in Kensington Gardens we should never see him in the flesh, but in every child that passed we should see his shape and know as a symbol of childish dreams Peter Pan was indeed a reality.

Of all Barrie's little fairies next to Peter, perhaps the most real and the most unreal is that awful little imp of mischief Tinker Bell, for who is there of us who does not feel just near us some reality (almost personal) which leads us astray or brings us back.

These fairy beings that Barrie has drawn so delightfully really belong to this world, they are almost our ideals and wishes put into definite shape, they are more than anything symbolic though this does not exclude them from the sphere of realism. They are those ideals that, though as we grow up seem to become more and more put on one side, at the most unexpected moments insist that they are still there, those moments when we see in the faint distance the child that was once ourself, those moments when suddenly in the crowded city we see some act of kindness, those moments when we realise with a horrid shock that it can hardly be that we were ever anything else but hard cold men of the world.

The Barri? fairies are the means of expressing

what so many feel and so few can express, the wonder of motherhood, the reality of not wishing to grow up, they are the thoughts of Barrie painted into a concrete shape. In so far as these fairy beings are concerned with ideals which seem to be the possession of the mass of mankind, they may be said to be real. For the real part of humanity is not that which is necessarily seen but that part which is there far beneath the actual surface.

We have then arrived at the conclusion that the Barrie characters are real, though it must be admitted that sometimes the word " real " has to undergo a considerable widening from the popular way in which it is used. But Barrie teaches perhaps more than any other playwright the extraordinary complexity of human nature, the wonderful fact that humanity is not only human but it is also superhuman. In the crowded streets, in the quiet lanes, in the vast expanses of the world we meet in ordinary persons Peter Pans, those unworldly people who never quite lose their childhood, who never allow themselves to be made hard and cynical.

The Barrie characters far from being unreal are even perchance supernatural and if we are really immortals then that part of us which is supernatural is the most real part of us.

## *Chapter Fourteen*

### BARRIE AND HIS PHILOSOPHY

TO suggest that a popular playwright like Barrie is a philosopher is at first sight a statement that may seem an exaggeration. For we are much inclined to connect philosophies, not with playwrights, not with novelists, not with essayists, but with those noble beings who move about a university town, with a distinct stoop and a capacity for refusing to look at things as they are. Another reason that it may be suggested that Barrie is not a philosopher is the one which says airily enough, that his public is so large, so varied, much of it is so undistinguished, that it would not listen to Barrie if he was a philosopher.

The real reason of such a statement is that the popular idea, like most popular ideas, of what a philosopher is, is quite fallacious. To the general mind the philosopher is thought of as a dull eccentric kind of recluse who thinks about the nature of the universe, has holes in his socks and looks upon woman as something essentially

to be left alone, if he wants to pay attention to his dialectics.

But in reality a philosopher is any man who states certain aspects of life, propounds certain problems, creates a certain outlook. Barrie may be said to be a philosopher in so much as he has an outlook on the world in general. This outlook can of course be discovered by his plays. I would not for an instant suggest that Barrie is a philosopher of the type of Plato, Kant or Aristotle. He does not appear to set out to get together any special system of ethics, nor does he seem to have any desire to give us any new theory of the universe. What he does do, is to deal lightly, mystically with certain human problems and by his plays we are enabled to decipher what is Barrie's outlook with regard to them. We must not expect any very deep reasoning, nor an academic outlook, for Barrie has not the imprint of the scholar nor the touch of the deep thinker, he has rather a way of looking at problems from a mystical point of view. Let me take his most philosophical play of all, "Dear Brutus."<sup>1</sup> It is without any doubt a serious attempt to consider the vexed question of matrimonial disharmony.

No problem is perhaps so baffling as the marriage one, Though there are naturally many marriages which are happy, as a general ideal, marriage has utterly failed. It has been called a Godlike institution by celibate priests who are careful never to embark upon it, it is held up as sacred by those women who-never\* have a

chance of putting their theories to the test, it is expected that with the accompaniment of hymns, the blessings of the assistant curate and a mutilated wedding march, marriage will mean lifelong happiness to two devoted young people who have never seen each other except under unnatural conditions. And then, when a divorce comes along, the pious assistant curate is shocked, the erring couple are ostracised, they are encouraged to go to the devil and the God who was said to bind them together is given a deportation ticket.

Men are naturally faithless, women are naturally possessed of assumed modesty and the result is that marriage between the two is in many cases only a convenient way of living together and starting the pact with a number of presents and the blessings of a Divine Being whose existence to many is a matter of the gravest doubt.

In "Dear Brutus" Barrie sees that people get tired of each other, but instead of telling them to continue together till the one kills the other, he lets them try someone else and in this play they of course prefer the original partner. Barrie's attitude then to marriage does appear to be somewhat orthodox but as a matter of fact his solution of the problem is not very useful or illuminating for two reasons. The one is that the characters appear to be of the type who would have been better not married at all, the other is that Barrie falls into the trap which holds bishops and the pious, which says that

divorced people never get on with the new partner. As a matter of fact they more often than not get on extremely well, thereby putting tD confusion the inane argument advanced by the Church that only those unions which are blessed by its feeble ministers can expect happiness. But then possibly marriages, which from a worldly point of view, appear to be misery are really divine happiness, but if so we much prefer to risk the blame of priests and risk the alleged "unhappiness"<sup>fi</sup> of unions which are made legal by a respectable looking man in a dull dingy Register Office. Barrie has made no contribution of any help to the marriage complex by his "Dear Brutus," though as a play it is charming and fully worthy of his wonderful pen.

It is not too much to say that "Dear Brutus" is a philosophy of marriage which fails to establish more than that if you are unhappy with your life partner, you will be more unhappy if you change for another, a very poor consolation,

In "The Admirable Crichton" Barrie by means of a gentle and pleasant satire thinks about the doctrine of the equality of man, a nice little subject for a play that will be more often than not played to a typical suburban mass, the matinee public of any West End Theatre. So much has been written of this doctrine of equality from well meaning theologians to ill meaning communists that it is refreshing to,find Barrie attacking the subjerf by means of an

original play. The conclusion of the matter seems to be that Barrie does agree that men are unequal, but he goes farther and indicates that they rather like being so. Thus the butler may appreciate being on an equality with his Lord and Master (in this play a real lord) but he has no intention of not being infinitely superior to the page boy. The people who least want equality are those for whom it is always demanded, the peer may be willing to meet on equal terms his dustman, but the dustman has no intention of fraternising with the rag and bone man or the public school headmaster may be quite desirous of meeting the sixth form boy on equality, but the sixth form boy would die rather than admit he was not immeasurably superior to the wretched creature in the fourth form. Barrie certainly in "The Admirable Crichton" shows clearly enough that the doctrine that all men are equal is to him nonsense, at least from the worldly point of view, whether of course they are all equal from the spiritual point of view Barrie wisely does not touch upon. It may be mentioned in passing that one of the most doubtful assumptions which all *good* Churchpeople accept, the equality of man in the sight of God, is a very doubtful truth, for if all men *are* equal in the sight of God then the criminal on the gallows is of the same value as the Archbishop pontificating in view of a mass of Pilgrims from Balham and SurLiton. This of course theologically may be true enough, but from the point of view of

reason, it is nothing short of absurd, if it is not quite blasphemous. But Barrie merely touches on the subject through the whimsicalities of a Mayfair peer and he undoubtedly infers that if Lords are only equal to butlers, butlers are far superior to page boys. His philosophy here is far sounder and far more reasonable than that given in "Dear Brutus."

Of all Barrie's plays "Mary Rose" has caused the greatest discussion as to its meaning. Mr. Thomas Moulton, a very discerning Barrie critic, thinks that the meaning of the play is symbolic. Thus he writes of it. "That Mary Rose was lost on the island is simply the dramatist's unique way of declaring that our sacred childhood is guarded, unless material forces are too much for it, by the Spirit of Faery. 'Whom the gods love die young.' Mary Rose was one of the children who never grow up, despite that she reaches womanhood and motherhood." To a certain extent this interpretation of Mary Rose seems true enough, but it does not go far enough. I think that there can be found a more subtle message and one that might even be unpopular because it attacks one of our most cherished beliefs. This is the belief that the dead cannot be mourned too much, a creed that makes death a miserable thing, which if it is "a universal," misconstrues its quality.

I am inclined to think that "Mary Rose" does teach more than anything else that we must not deplore the death of people too much, for were they to come back we should find that

we didn't want them so much as we thought. Mr. Ernest Thesiger who is perhaps the best interpreter of Cameron has told me that he thinks that one message " Mary Rose " conveys is "that the dead should not be mourned unduly." I think that this is not " one " message of " Mary Rose " but " the " message.

<sup>11</sup> " Mary Rose " has a dire melancholy philosophy, it seems to be born with tears, the whole atmosphere is sombre, we feel that Barrie sees well enough how many people in this world are lost, and as completely lost (though it be in a great city) as upon a lonely island. The whole trend of the play is sad, the whole feeling of " Mary Rose " is isolation, that isolation never so acutely felt as when we find ourselves on an island hummed in on every side by the cold relentless sea. It is probably reading something into " Mary Rose " that Barrie never meant, if we try to infer that " Mary Rose " is an apology for spiritualism, for in one of his war plays Barrie touches on this subject, but the coming back of the soldier son killed in action, is totally different to the coming back after twenty years of Mary Rose.

In this play Barrie achieves the greatest success from a purely dramatic point of view, but it is not his best play, it is undoubtedly inferior to " Peter Pan,"<sup>11</sup> though possibly superior to " Dear Brutus." Perhaps " Mary Rose " sums up more generally the philosophy of Barrie than any other play, the philosophy of melancholy not for any specific reason but

because life is a sad thing, it passes, and we scarcely know it, so much of humanity is lost, so much is never found.

Much of Barrie's work in his plays has dealt with women and their influence. It may not be too much to say that Barrie has a philosophy of womanhood. Barrie's women are not ordinary persons at all, they seem to be remarkable.

" What Every Woman Knows " is the essence of his philosophy, which is, the vast influence she wields. Is it true that women do have much influence on the world ? To a certain extent they certainly do, but a great part of that influence is bad. Many young women are potentially evil but discretion keeps many of them from crime, many young women are entirely selfish and lacking in any respect to those who are older, many young women are religious if the curate is good-looking, many young women decide early in life whether they will marry, become typists or cast virtue on one side and give their affections to the many.

Barrie's feminine characters are with the exception of those in " Quality Street " a little exceptional, they are womanhood at its best, especially in the case of Maggie Wylie. Barrie's philosophy of woman is on the whole entirely mistaken, he gives them far more honour than they deserve, he forgets that women as a whole are far inferior to men for the simple fact that modern women strive daily to be equal to them, this striving demonstrating their feeling of inferiority.

" Peter Pan," and " A Kiss for Cinderella " deal with the philosophy of the fairy. Barrie's philosophy of fairyland seems to be that it is a very real place, the inhabitants of it may even be found in Kensington Gardens ! Barrie's philosophy of the fairies is far more for grown-ups than for children, it has a good deal to do with the wistful longing many people feel for the days when they really believed that elves dwelt in the woods, that fairies danced out of flowers when the moon came out. The Barrie fairy philosophy is once again melancholy, wistful, full of unsatisfied longings. Peter Pan is himself the personification of the childish wish for adventure which starts with a flight through the nursery window. The little servant girl in " A Kiss for Cinderella " shows clearly enough that Barrie realises that romance and belief in the beautiful is to be found in the kitchen as much as (if not more so than) in the drawing room. Barrie's fairies are unworldly yet in a sense they are of the world. We may not be able to see them but we can feel them within ourselves.

. . . . .

In his plays Barrie touches on practically every kind of human emotion. He shows us what love is, what fear is. Yet it cannot be said that Barrie's philosophy is really at all constructive, it is more than anything a point of view and perhaps an expressed opinion for or against. As I have shewn, Barrie makes no

contribution to the marriage problem ; he leaves us in great doubt as to whether he believes in spiritualism, he appears to have the Scotch belief in religion, a cold austere code of ethics. In all his writings Barrie blends exquisite humour with delicate pathos, his general outlook is melancholy, unsatisfied, we feel that somehow Barrie has just failed to find life what he hoped it might be. His philosophy is rather that of the prevalence of illusion, things are not what they seem, people strive desperately and when they succeed, no longer want that which they strove for. There is nothing original in his philosophy, nothing of the system of Bernard Shaw (the super man quest). Barrie takes people as they appear to him, he writes with vast understanding of human nature (for the most part) he grieves over its sadnesses, he sympathises with its hopes.

Perhaps above all his philosophy is that of the absolute value of the child mind, the absolute trust of the child, the spiritual value of the child's belief in fairies. So long as we are content to say a philosophy need not be more than a general outlook upon life, so long may we deem Barrie a philosopher. But if we narrow down philosophy to an academic attempt to grasp the meaning of the universe, we shall not be able to call Barrie a philosopher.

From the solitary heights Barrie looks down at the world spread out beneath, he sees mankind struggling here, struggling there, in the far distance he sees the realms of the immortals, he

realises how we poor humans are striving for that land, though we feign would admit it. Barrie writes then very largely of man's aspiration for the mystical, he writes of man not as a mass of flesh but as the outward expression of the inner soul, as he writes he touches on certain problems, in a fashion gives us his possible solution, almost in passing. So in the way that he writes of men's ideals do we get at what we may call without exaggeration the philosophy of Barrie.

## *Chapter Fifteen*

### AMONG THE CONTEMPORARIES

**I**T is a very fascinating question to ask what is the place Barrie occupies in the theatre to-day. We are often enough informed that the English stage is debased, that revue and musical comedy are the order of the day. It is true that ShaKespeare can only flourish on the Surrey side of the Thames or far north where the trains leave for Barrie's Scotland.

Managers with an air of the deepest despondency and with the noblest intentions, declare piteously that if only the public would come they would put on good plays. But the public, they say, likes chorus girls and likes immensely their legs so that the more leg there is the better is the return at the box office. Highbrows who meet together in West End clubs discuss the trend of the stage over tea and muffins and come to the conclusion that it is far better not to go to the theatre as there isn't a thing worth seeing. The general public which lives in Balham and may also be found in North Kensington still sticks to the old English

stage, looks upon it as the thing to do on Saturday night, and is not particular so long as the show thrills, amuses and makes father feel for three hours a great hero or a great devil when he is merely a bowler-hatted clerk.

At the present time probably there is no playwright living who can be as certain of a fair hearing as Barrie. Any Barrie revival draws a crowded house, the critics for the most part come prepared to be sympathetic. Christmas without Peter Pan would be as unusual as Christmas without the postman's knock. Barrie has become so connected with Christmas that the ideas of Christmas in theatreland will have to undergo an immense change before he is excluded from the Christmas productions.

For the rest of the year Barrie can also be called upon to fill a bill successfully for a considerable period. There is no living playwright quite like Barrie but this is not to say necessarily that there are none superior. I do not think that Barrie is so brilliant a playwright as his near neighbour Bernard Shaw. Barrie has not the deep philosophy that is apparent in the Shavian plays, he has not the same dry caustic humour. Shaw preaches Shavinianism through his plays, Barrie pours out almost at times, with a sob, his love of fairies and immortal emanations.

Barrie draws a very different public to Shaw, Shaw draws that public which is not afraid to think, which is not afraid to shun that most dangerous illusion orthodox convention. Barrie probably has a vast public of women, not

because he is in any *special* sense an emotional playwright, for women like to see the exaggerated pictures of their sex, which Barrie occasionally indulges in. For I have said above that Barrie has a philosophy of womanhood and honours them far more than they deserve. And of all the theatrical publics, the feminine one loves to see itself greatly honoured, treated with the chivalry it doesn't deserve, almost looked upon as something superhuman, able to mould this naughty world into a moral mass ruled by fe'minists who will see that man is kept in the background and only used when cash is short or passions are strong. For Barrie with the possible exception of his play " Alice Sit By The Fire " hardly touches on the real side of woman, her love of flattery, her love of the modest pose, her love of pretence. Barrie then is more than any of his contemporaries a playwright loved by women, for women do not mind being put on a pedestal so long as that pedestal is a false one.

Shaw on the other hand draws women much more skilfully, they are naturally much less pleasant than Barrie's feminine characters, but they are for this essential reason true to life.

It has been attempted at various times and in divers places from the theatrical clubs to the dramatic critics to draw some comparison between Galsworthy and Barrie. The attempt has quite deservedly failed utterly, for no two dramatic writers are so unlike. The suggestion that Barrie has a legal outlook on life is nearly

as silly as expecting to see Galsworthy creating a Peter Pan not of Kensington Gardens but of the Inner Temple. Barrie never sits as a judge, even when he *suggests* a course of action as in "Dear Brutus," he does it in a pathetic way very different from the cold legal commonplaces that fall from the thin lips of judges. But Galsworthy is always legal, he is intensely in earnest, so much that his reputation may suffer, he has no mystical outlook, a wood could not appear to him a harbour for fairies, but as the admirable background for a murder.

There is only one point upon which Galsworthy and Barrie may be said to be in the same category, that is, though they both deal with problems, both fail to find solutions, both state a position and more or less leave it. In a sense neither Galsworthy or Barrie are constructive, they are neither consciously destructive (as Shaw always is) they both have certain superficialities though Galsworthy is apparently more concerned with man's miseries than Barrie is. For Barrie though he lets us know how much he feels mankind does miss what it might achieve, seems to be more concerned with the spiritual "missing,"<sup>1</sup> while Galsworthy deplores the miseries mankind undergoes in this troublesome yet irresistible world.

Of the two, Barrie is the finer playwright, because he deals with the eternal values while Galsworthy is of this particular age. Barrie, I said above, could not be compared to Galsworthy for they are totally unlike. But it may

be truer to say that it rather depends on the comparison. If attempt is made to compare the "likenesses" of the two, then the only common ground is their mutual failure to solve problems, if their "unlikenesses" are considered it is waste of time to attempt a comparison for the task is quite endless. Yet many critics do attempt this without any success.

It will be quite in accordance with this chapter to consider the permanence of Barrie, for the consideration depends very largely upon his place among his contemporaries. Without drawing too general a conclusion, it does seem apparent enough that the leading playwrights of to-day merely use the stage for showing life of the present era and dealing with it either by direct portraiture or satire. Even Shaw is not immune from this tendency, his quarrels are with modern conventions, he attacks what he considers are abuses of the day. In a hundred years it may be so, that conditions will have so entirely changed that Bernard Shaw will have no place in the theatre. And I do not forget that there are those who see in his plays such an abundance of excellence that they give them immortality apart from the fact as to whether they would deal with current matters or not.

Perhaps the same criticism applies to Galsworthy, though I suggest that of the two Shaw is far more likely to live, his plays are far more subtle, far more interesting apart from their topical interest. With the exception of Shaw and Galsworthy I fail to see a single play-

wright who may be safe for a good hearing in the years that will come when this century has drawn to its appointed end. We must then ask how is it with our playwright, has Barrie the permanence I would deny to all his contemporaries with the possible exceptions of the two already mentioned.

It is obvious to even the most superficial observer that much of Barrie's work in connection with the theatre is in no particular sense a picture of the twentieth century. In this may be found the essential difference between Barrie and his contemporaries. There does not seem to be any special reason why, in the year 2000, "Peter Pan" should not be played, even if Christmas has been abolished, even if we only go to a theatre to escape from our homes, where no doubt our food will be broadcasted, where we shall chat to our friends ten thousand miles away by means of a telephone.

If any play is likely to suffer neglect in the future it will be "Dear Brutus," for more than any other of Barrie's dramatic works, this one is concerned with a very serious twentieth century condition. It is likely enough that in the year two thousand Mary Rose will still make men and women sob as she disappears on the Island. Barrie quite obviously has written his plays with one eye on immortality, for he could have easily, in most of them, given a topical turn. In large part again, the Barrie plays deal with parts of human nature that do not change, for in this world of daily new dis-

coveries, the only persistently constant thing, is human nature. Human nature which scorned Peter Pan would be inhuman ill nature, melancholy which was not appeased by Mary Rose would be but pseudo tears.

Barrie always appeals to the fundamentals, he can always make us laugh, he can always make us cry, he does not make us angry nor does he make us too cynical. Barrie is really one of those few writers whose work seems to appeal to any period, he is not in most senses topical of this century, a fairly good reason for prophesying him immortality. His fairies are not only immortal but they are really the personifications of that part of us which is immortal. Most contemporary playwrights appeal to the mortal part of us ; in Barrie we find food that feeds that faculty we all really possess (though many seem to deny this ) ; the hankering after that which satisfies the soul. Barrie though he does not always satisfy the soul, makes us very conscious that we are possessed of one. Bernard Shaw, Galsworthy and many other leading playwrights never really touch the soul, Shaw no doubt gives an impetus to the intellect, Galsworthy stirs the emotions but Barrie makes us young when we are old, he makes us unworldly when the world is most at hand, he leads us by the still waters of pondering, he takes us gently by the hand to the fairy realms, he teaches us that though we are flesh and very very mortal, we are at the same time undeniably immortal.

In attempting to place Mr. Chesterton among contemporary writers I came to the conclusion that the word "unique" best placed him. In the world of dramatic authors probably Barrie is "unique" there does not seem to be any playwright quite like him.

Perhaps it may be that in the future Barrie will be known as the most popular playwright of the early twentieth century, who was more than any of his contemporaries quite detached from the ideals and methods of conduct of that era. Barrie will never die so long as man is a trinity of the physical, psychical and the spiritual and so long as the third attribute is not entirely neglected. There is no reason to suppose that Barrie will not live when he is dead, nor is there any good purpose in suggesting that the English theatre can ever do without him.

## *Chapter Sixteen*

### SUMMING UP

OERHAPS we cannot end this attempted \* study of Sir James Barrie better than by summarising quite briefly his attitude to life. This attitude I have attempted to show already in some detail but a generalisation may not be out of place.

Barrie does seem to look upon life as something noble, as something worth while. In every man he sees the spiritual spark, in every man he seems to find something that is noble, if only it can be got at. Barrie looks upon evil as always conquerable by good. In every mortal he discerns the immortal, in every immortal there is also something of the mortal. Barrie does not set out very seriously to attack modern problems, he rather gives us his philosophy of whimsicality.

Barrie has withdrawn himself a good deal from the world, he does not care to make many public appearances, nor is he to be seen much even in literary circles. He gazes at the world from afar off, sees mankind stru^gling^ with

material forces and attempting not to be entirely conquered by them. Barrie has given to the world some of the most beautiful plays that the mind of man has yet conceived, they represent his unworldly and fairylike thoughts about the universe.

Barrie preaches sanity to a world of lunatics, but fortunately many of the lunatics are quite willing to listen to him. Of this century Barrie is one of the great minds, his name will remain for all time as the great playwright who has made the land of the fairy a kind of religion, because in it are embodied those ideals which mankind possesses even though it so often seems to deny them.

His attitude to life is kind, sympathetic, yet tinged with melancholy. Barrie touches life with delicate care, he shows us the holiness of it, he makes us realise that the material is only temporary but that the mystical, the fairy, the ideal are those things which are permanent.

THE END









