J. M. BARRIE

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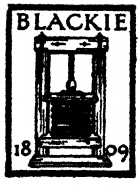
J. M. Barrie
(1921)

J. M. BARRIE

BY

W. A. DARLINGTON



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PREFACE

WHEN I was first invited to contribute a Life of Barrie to this series, the idea at once pleased and disturbed me. There was almost nobody among the authors of my time about whom I would more gladly write; but how could I presume to do so, since I had never known Barrie, and many people without that handicap were available? I told the publishers something of my doubts, and they answered that if I would do what I had previously, in another series, done for Sheridan, they would be well satisfied. This, though encouraging, did not solve my difficulty. It was obviously not possible for me to do anything in the least like what I had done for Sheridan. Sheridan, when I wrote about him, had been dead for more than a hundred years, all those who had known him were dead too, and all private information concerning him had become public property. To go over the evidence, and from it to find out what kind of man Sheridan must have been, was not only a fascinating task but a safe one. Nobody could impugn my right to speak.

It was very different with Barrie. Since I could not write of him with intimate personal knowledge, and since it would obviously not be to the interest of his literary executors (who would no doubt be appointing some one of his many friends, before long, to write a big, full biography) to give me access to any of the new material in their possession, was there anything left

which gave me a special right to speak of him at all? Of one thing I was quite determined, that lacking some such special right I must not undertake the task, because a short life of Barrie written after his death, and containing nothing but a re-hash of what had been written about him during his life, was foredoomed to be a dull piece of hack-work. In order to settle this question in my own mind, I began to read some of the books about Barrie that were already in existence, and soon afterwards I wrote to Messrs. Blackie accepting their invitation. I had found a gap on the Barrie bookshelf which I might hope to fill as well as another.

Barrie was a theatre man. He was a literary man of great powers also; but in spite of a hankering after novel-writing that persisted to the end of his life, he let the theatre become his chief means of expression, and he used it with a certainty and a delicate skill that have never been surpassed. Yet I found to my astonishment that not one of the men who have written accounts of his life, whether their prime object was to tell his story or to "place" him as an artist, has had any inside knowledge or experience of the theatre at all. None of the writers in question seems to think that this can matter. Most of them, having dealt with Barrie the novelist, go on quite confidently to measure Barrie the dramatist with the same yardstick, and never dream that the implement is now useless.

My claim to speak, therefore, is that I am, alike by inclination and training, a theatre man. I believe that the theatre is the only place where plays can really be judged; and that if they are to be judged from the printed page at all, the only man who should make the attempt is the man with "a theatre in his head"—the man, that is, whose methods of judgment have been

learnt in the theatre, and who can call the peculiar theatrical imagination to his aid. All published plays, therefore, are a snare to the purely literary critic, and Barrie's are particularly dangerous to him because of the form in which they are printed. Barrie, like all other good theatre men, meant his plays to be acted, not read, and for many years would not have them published—though one got into an "acting edition" because he had lost control of the copyright. And when at last he did publish them, he did so in a new form designed to please his own literary sense. He elaborated his stage-directions so much that the plays could be read almost like pieces of continuous prose. Indeed, in one edition of *Alice Sit-by-the-Fire*, he actually did print half of the first act as continuous prose, with the dialogue inserted, like conversations in a novel, between inverted commas.

The theatre-trained man, when he reads a play, ignores the stage-directions as much as he can. They are little use to him. All he wants of them is a bald description of the scene, and some sort of indication what the characters look like. Having got that, he reads the dialogue only, and the performance in the "theatre in his head" promptly begins. The man with the purely literary approach to a play, on the other hand, adores stage-directions, because they are the nearest thing in this form of composition to the descriptive passages which he is used to in novels. And when he comes across stage-directions as full and as enchantingly written as Barrie's, he lets them mount to his brain like wine.

Since I must give chapter and verse for this assertion, let me take an example from the work of a man whose ability I respect and whose book I enjoyed. Mr. Thomas

Moult, after having written about Barrie's novels in a most discerning and illuminative way, goes to pieces when he comes to the plays and says things which I can only account for by suggesting that he is maddened by over-indulgence in the heady brew. In pointing out the beauties of *Mary Rose*, for instance, he quotes a long passage from the end of the second act, where Mary Rose vanishes. Exactly two-thirds of that quotation (yes, I have counted the words) is stage-direction, including a description, exquisitely done, of how the fairy call comes and how Mary Rose receives it. The theatre man, who thinks of stage-directions simply as instructions in the light of which the producer, the designer, the composer and the actors can go about their share of the play, regards all this fine writing as pure waste. What is more, he knows that in this passage as published Barrie is not giving instructions at all, but is describing, seven or eight years after the event, the effect actually made by this scene in the theatre. At the time when the play was written he did not even know what those effects would be, as I shall show in a moment. Therefore, though Mr. Moult's quotation from the stage-directions can legitimately be put forward as evidence of Barrie's *literary* skill, it can prove nothing one way or the other about his ability as a dramatist. Only the few lines of dialogue at the end of the quoted passage can do that.

Barrie's actual stage-directions, as they appeared in the original manuscripts of his plays, were intended not for the delectation of readers but for use in the theatre. They were full, but they were precise and practical, and I have the word of Charles La Trobe, who has been stage-manager at the Haymarket Theatre for many years and was in charge of *Mary Rose*, that they were

"extremely easy to work from". He showed me the original typed copy of *Mary Rose* which is preserved at the Haymarket, and so I am able to give the exact words in which Barrie originally expressed his idea how Mary Rose's disappearance should be carried out. Here they are:

The island has begun to "call" to Mary Rose. The sound . . . is soon like a great storm of waves and screaming winds, whose effects may possibly be best got musically but perhaps best by stage mechanism.

That is Barrie the dramatist speaking. The one who captured Mr. Moult's fancy was Barrie the literary man. In the event, the effect *was* got musically. Norman O'Neill was the composer, and he had the idea of adding atmosphere by making human voices call Mary Rose's name through wild music.

Barrie did not like this at first. His suggestion was that there should be some kind of metallic clang, and that Mary Rose should vanish in mid-stage. Holman Clark, the producer, was an adept at this kind of magical effect; but ingenious mechanical tricks, when experimented with at rehearsal, seemed out of place in such a play, and it was the author himself who saw that the best way after all was the simplest, of making Mary Rose walk off the stage as if drawn by some unseen, irresistible force. Barrie's objection to the music still remained, however, and Holman Clark spent the better part of a morning in the orchestra pit making strange unearthly noises without hitting on one which seemed suitable. Meanwhile, O'Neill had written his music, and Barrie was persuaded to listen to it. As soon as he heard it he liked it, and when he came to rewrite his

play for publication he described its effect in detail; and so something which Mr. Moult selects as being specially praiseworthy in Barrie's dramatic work turns out not to be Barrie's work at all, but merely his description of O'Neill's work.

The theatre man, of course, does not care whose work it is. It makes no difference to the play whether the stage-directions are in the author's limpid English or have been written in at rehearsal by one of the producer's underlings. One of the stage-directions in the prompt copy of *The Boy David* actually reads as follows:

(SAUL) BRACES HIMSELF THEN THROW JAVELIN INTO TENT, HARPSTOP, SAUL FULL OF REMORSE GOES R. AND SITS DAVID STEALS OUT OF TENT AND GOES UP NEARLY OFF, SEES SAUL DOWNCAST, RETURNS AND STARTS PLAYING HARP, SAUL EVENTUALLY REALIZES ITS DAVID LOOKS AT HIM HE LOOKS UP, AND HEAVES SIGH OF RELEIF.

Barrie neither worded, punctuated nor spelt that entry, which was made when the original javelin scene proved incomprehensible at the Edinburgh first night and had to be altered. The alterations were doubtless made by Barrie himself, but they were entered in the book by anybody who happened to be holding it at the time. Although the result is little better than illiterate jargon, it serves its purpose of setting out the movements of the actors in the new version of the scene; and as the new version was much more effective than the original one, I am sure that the lack of grace in the stage-direction would not trouble the mind of Barrie the practical dramatist. Another stage-direction from the prompt book of *The Boy David* which never got into

print contained Barrie's original suggestions for the staging of the death of Goliath. He wanted this event to happen on the stage, so that the audience should see the giant fall. This was attempted at Edinburgh, but proved ineffective, and so in London Goliath died "off". The prompt book preserves both versions of this—the first one blue-pencilled, but still legible—and the original direction reads:

We see Goliath in all his dreadfulness. . . . The proposal is to get this effect—if it can be got—by having his figure out of perspective, helped by stage-craft beyond the capacity of the author. If this idea has to be reluctantly abandoned Goliath should be a genuine giant built up to seem higher than he is, and if this is followed it is not necessary that he should be the person who really speaks the few words that come from his mouth.

Again, the practical dramatist speaks. And indeed, in the published version of *The Boy David*, he speaks for all to hear. Barrie died before he could rewrite this play for publication, and so for the only time some of his genuine stage-directions did at last find their way into print.

This matter of stage-directions is in itself a small one, but it does show how wide is the difference in outlook between those who write about the theatre from the inside and those who come to it from without; and difference in outlook leads inevitably to difference in judgment. Mr. Moult, for instance, dismisses *The Twelve-Pound Look* as "an anecdote", adding with an air of faint surprise that "many people have taken it seriously"; and then goes on to give half a page of panegyric to *The Will*. Well, that may seem a sensible

judgment to a man who sits at a desk examining the two plays in cold print, with no "theatre in his head" to help him, but it is not a judgment with which many theatre men will concur. Among theatre people it is a fairly general opinion, and most certainly it is mine, that while *The Will* is an excellent piece of craftsmanship, *The Twelve-Pound Look* is the best one-act play that Barrie ever wrote. As to its being an anecdote, even at his desk Mr. Moult ought to have observed that the two plays have exactly the same theme—namely, the emptiness of a merely material success; but he would have to go to the theatre to find out that, before an audience, the warm humanity of *The Twelve-Pound Look* makes it much the more impressive statement of that theme.

I must not carry this argument farther, or it will seem to have a polemical tone which is very far from my purpose. I make no apology, however, for stating my case thus fully, for I have always found that the purely literary critic is very reluctant to admit that his method of approach to the theatre invalidates his judgment. Barrie was a literary man in his study, a theatre man on the stage, and the difference between the two was always very clear in his mind. Therefore, when a big authoritative "Life" comes to be written, it should be done by some writer with a claim to be listened to with equal respect in the world of books and in the theatre world. But till that big book appears, I hope that there may perhaps be room for a little book written, as I am bound to write it, chiefly from the theatre's point of view.

There is a formidable list of people to whom I owe acknowledgments. To Barrie's literary executors, Lady Cynthia Asquith and Mr. Peter Davies, I am grateful

for permission to quote from Barrie's writings, published and unpublished, and for the benevolent attitude they have adopted during the writing of the book. Sir John Hammerton has earned gratitude from all writers about Barrie, for his big book *Barrie: The Story of a Genius*, not only contains a vast store of facts but also shows where to look for more. In passing, however, I feel that I ought to warn future searchers after truth that this book, written by an exceedingly busy journalist, bears signs of hasty proof-reading; there are occasional inaccuracies of names and dates, usually so obvious that they must be slips of the pen rather than genuine mistakes. But Sir John has avoided the worst mistake into which writers on Barrie have tended to fall, that of copying another's blunders. He has gone to original sources for his facts, and so has done admirable pioneer work for all who come after. Besides this general tribute I must give him my personal thanks for help, advice and the run of his Barrie library, all placed most generously at my disposal.

To Miss Irene Vanbrugh I am under a special obligation, both for letting me ransack her clear and detailed memory, and for lending me her treasured copy of *Ibsen's Ghost*. To Sir Seymour Hicks my debt is almost as great, for putting his memory and his scrap-book at my service. Mr. Golding Bright, who lent me the prompt book of *The Boy David*; the management of the Haymarket Theatre, who let me have their prompt copies of *A Kiss for Cinderella* and the revival of *Quality Street*, and the original typescript of *Mary Rose*; Mr. T. C. Irving, who allowed me to use Barrie's schoolboy letters to his brother, which were first published by Mr. E. V. Lucas in the *Sunday Times*; Mr. Harold Forrester of Edinburgh, who not only gave me

access to those letters but made with his own hand accurate copies of them for me to keep; all these go to swell the tale. As for that walking encyclopædia of stage lore, Mr. John Parker, a man whose accuracy of mind is positively frightening, I do not know what I should have done without him. He seems not only to know his own vast tome, *Who's Who in the Theatre*, by heart, but also to be able, at any moment of the day or night, to provide from memory a commentary on its entries. He has given me much information, and to him must go the credit for the rediscovery of Barrie's theatre articles in *Time*; for he drew my attention to a reference to them in Walter Sichel's autobiography. Also, he has corrected the proofs of this book, which is, humanly speaking, a guarantee of its accuracy as to dates.

I have not found it necessary to quote substantially from Barrie's novels or plays; indeed, I have avoided doing so of set purpose, because this is a short book, and once one begins quoting Barrie it is almost impossible to stop. For the occasional sentences that I have used I make acknowledgment to the publishers, Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton; and I am indebted to Messrs. Duckworth for permission to quote from *Dogs and Men*.

One more note. There are two stock threadbare adjectives which Barrie once asked a gathering of critics not to use of his work. I have not used them here. Except in this sentence, " whimsical " does not appear; and if " elusive " has crept in anywhere, that is only because it has eluded me.

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Chapter I

LEGEND

WHEN James Matthew Barrie died on 19th June, 1937, full of age and honours, he had led the life of a hermit for nearly thirty years. In his quiet flat high up in the now vanished Adelphi Terrace in London, overlooking the Thames Embankment, he saw few people, and his public appearances were so rare that each was treated by the newspapers as a nine days' wonder. Even in private, among his friends, he was apt on occasion to withdraw into himself. At such times he would sit wrapped in a sad silence out of which nothing could tempt him.

That a man so famous and so solitary should become a figure of legend even in his lifetime was inevitable. In these days, any man of mark who is detected in the act of trying to keep himself to himself is considered to be acting in a manner prejudicial to good order and the public interest. If no intimate details of his life are known, Rumour will invent some for him. If such details are known, Rumour will embroider them. Only by sacrificing his privacy can such a man hope to be known for what he is; generally he prefers to acquiesce in his own legend.

Barrie did more than acquiesce in the legend concerning himself. He outdid Rumour at her own game. In his youth he kept silence about himself, or at least,

entered the confessional only in disguise, as the Little Minister or the schoolmaster of Glen Quharity; but in his later years, when he had added public speaking to the arts in which he excelled, he became communicative, and sometimes added to the legend characteristic touches much more picturesque than any that Rumour had been able to invent, but even less reliable.

I make this point at the outset, for it is fundamental. Anybody who proposes to write (or, for that matter, to read) a biography of Barrie must have it always in mind. The chief source of information about Barrie is Barrie himself. In *Margaret Ogilvy*, in *The Greenwood Hat*, and in many of his speeches he has given us a wealth of autobiographical detail, always set forth with supreme craftsmanship and bearing the stamp of truth. But its truth is the truth of the artist, not of the historian. Barrie wrote about himself as he wrote about a character in a play or book, selecting, rejecting and inventing what material he needed to make his creation lively and life-like. He must not be relied on for exact dates, or for accuracy concerning the places where things happened or the order in which they happened. Again and again, in *Margaret Ogilvy* or in the speeches, he telescopes into one sentence of continuous narrative events which in fact were separated by many miles and many months.

The clearest and most detailed example that I have found of Barrie's way of mixing fact and fancy in his autobiographical passages is the story of the fascinating widow. This lady made her first appearance (in her bereaved state, that is) on 5th March, 1935, at the luncheon given by *The Daily Telegraph* to the committee which was to organize Marie Tempest's jubilee

matinée at Drury Lane. Barrie proposed the toast of Miss Tempest in what proved to be his last public speech. Delivered in his customary manner, without inflection of voice or expression of face, with the speaker's eye fixed for much of the time on the ceiling, this speech was an enchanting farewell performance. He began by explaining to the company that he had once done Miss Tempest a great wrong, and that although she did not even know of the incident, he was now going to take a long-sought opportunity to confess and apologize.

"Know then," he went on, "that in ancient times, when I was a boy and Miss Tempest was still unborn, I played in school theatricals and had the part of a captivating widow in a picture hat to which my long tresses were secured with glue. . . . The years rolled on and when I came to London I naturally went to see Miss Tempest, the young actress they were already all talking of. Conceive my shock when I found her playing *my part*! . . . I said to all who would listen that I thought Miss Tempest quite good, but that she seemed to me to lack some of my womanly touches."

It is not probable that many people who heard this anecdote believed that the widow had ever existed except in the speaker's imagination. But some might have remembered that before her widowhood she had appeared in an earlier speech, and had then been played by a different actress. This was at Dumfries on 11th December, 1924, when Barrie was presented with the freedom of the borough. He had been at school there, and his speech—one of the finest he ever made—was packed full of intimate personal reminiscence, in which occurred the following:

My first play was very properly written for the Dumfries Academy Dramatic Society, on whose boards I also made my only appearances as an actor. That was due to the histrionic enthusiasm of an Academy boy, certainly the best amateur actor I have ever seen, who I am glad to know is here to-day, and who blushes so easily—at least he blushed easily a century or two ago—that I shall cleverly conceal his identity under the name of Wedd. . . . Our Wedd was truly great in low comedy, but not so convincing as a young lady with her hair attached to her hat, the sort of part for which he usually cast me. . . .

. . . I think I did greatest credit to our admired Wedd on one occasion when the curtain rose on my husband and me about to partake of breakfast, and in his stage-fright my husband pulled the table-cover and its contents to the floor. How would a superb actress have risen to that emergency? I have asked some of them—Sarah Bernhardt and others—and none of them conceived anything equal to what that Adèle did. (Adèle was my name, I was taken from the French; but the unworthy youth who played my husband *would* call me Addle, to my annoyance.) I went behind him, and putting my arms round his neck—yet not forgetting even in that supreme moment to be wary about my hair and hat—I said, "You clumsy darling!" The house rose—I don't mean they went out. Several of them cheered, led on by Wedd who, when not actually on the stage himself, was always somewhere in hiding, leading the applause. Thus was a great comedienne lost to the world. The next time I saw that play was in London, with Miss Irene Vanbrugh in my part. You can guess I was critical, and she was nervous. I told her I thought her good, but that she was lacking in some of my womanly touches.

On first encountering those two passages I was inclined—as, I think, the reader will also be—to reject the Tempest-Bernhardt-Vanbrugh references altogether

as mere Barrie-isms, and to be very sceptical about the remainder of the story. But when, for the purposes of this book, I began to read what was known of Barrie's youth, I was astonished to find that the main facts were precisely as he gave them in the Dumfries speech. In 1876, Barrie was honorary secretary of an Amateur Dramatic Club founded at Dumfries Academy by Wellwood Anderson, son of a local bookseller, and original of " Wedd ". In March, 1878, the Club produced a triple bill, which included *The Weavers*, described on the programme as " Mr. J. L. Toole's favourite comic drama in one act ". Barrie had the part of a young wife in this play, and her name was Adèle.

There is no record of any play called *The Weavers* having been produced at Toole's or any other London theatre. This has discouraged biographers from making any attempt to identify this play, and has led two or three writers to make the entirely unfounded assertion that Barrie wrote it himself. In actual fact, it was *The Spitalfields Weaver*, a farce by T. Haines Bayly, an old piece dating from 1838, which Toole was fond of reviving. When he took it out on tour, however, he sometimes changed its title to *The Weavers* on the ground that Spitalfields meant nothing to playgoers who did not know London. Like most English plays of its time, it *was* (as Barrie says) an adaptation from a French original. Toole gave it a run at his own theatre beginning on 25th January, 1890, at which time Barrie was living in London and could well have seen it. And a programme of this production yields two more striking pieces of evidence in proof of Barrie's accuracy. One is that the name of the heroine is spelt not " Adèle " but " Adelle "—a clumsy Anglicization (assuming that

it is not a misprint) which may have been a justification for the youth who pronounced it " Addle ". The other is that the part was played by Irene Vanbrugh. Furthermore, Miss Vanbrugh appeared, under Toole's management, in the two first plays of Barrie's ever to be produced on the London stage, *Ibsen's Ghost* and *Walker, London*; and when I asked her whether Barrie did in fact make the remark to her about his " womanly touches ", she answered most positively that he did indeed, she believed after a rehearsal of the latter play, and that it was a standing joke between them for years.

All this goes to establish what I believe to be the truth, that though Barrie sometimes took an impish delight in decorating or even fantasticating his own portrait, he never falsified it. There are many points of detail in the Dumfries speech which are pure invention—for instance, the statement that he wrote his first play in order to get away from female parts; the facts being that the play in question was written before he had acted any parts at all, male or female, and that his appearance as Adèle (or Adelle) took place a year and a quarter later. But we have seen that the tale is true in all its main essentials. What, then, are we to think about those parts of the story which cannot now be corroborated or denied? Are we to believe, for instance, that the " clumsy darling " incident happened, or to dismiss it as a happy invention? For myself, I am inclined to believe it, if only because Barrie repeats it in *The Greenwood Hat*, the book in which, because it was written originally for private circulation among his friends and not for the public eye, he seems at last to be aiming at unadorned autobiography. But I realize, all the same, that in the case of Barrie we can lay down

no comforting hard-and-fast rule such as Lewis Carroll's Bellman made for himself, that what he tells you three times is true. Each unsupported statement must be examined on its merits, and be believed or not accordingly. We should do well, also, to keep before us Barrie's own confession that in writing *The Greenwood Hat* he abandoned the idea of giving the book a subtitle *Memories and Fancies*, " not being always sure, despite the best intentions, where the memories became fancies and the fancies memories ".

This account of the life of Barrie, then, lies before us like a pleasant but treacherous water-meadow which author and reader must cross in company. To the casual eye it may seem all solid earth, but we know better. We know that it will prove to have places where the earth will sink suddenly under our feet; but so long as we remember to distrust those spots where the grass seems greenest and most inviting, I have hopes that we may arrive at the other side together and in fairly good order.

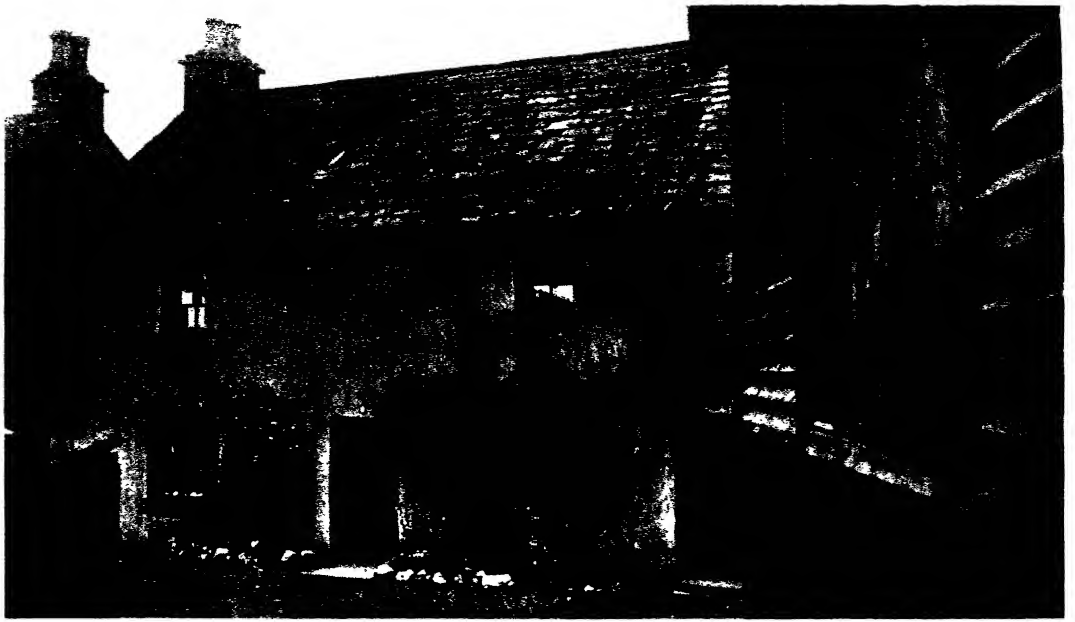
Chapter II

EARLY YEARS

KIRRIEMUIR in Forfarshire is a small place of fewer than 4000 inhabitants and was smaller still when Barrie was born there on 7th May, 1860. Five miles east by south of it is Forfar, the county town. Five miles due south is Glamis Castle, which was known to the world at large chiefly for its ghosts until it gave a Queen to the British throne.

The town stands in beautiful country at the foot of the Grampians. It has some historic and antiquarian interest, and the much prized right to call itself a "regality"; but it is not in itself specially notable. The opposite view has been strongly expressed by partisans, for the Scot, like the American, is apt to rhapsodize about his "home town". But only natives will dissent with any passion from the general opinion that Kirriemuir's best claim to fame is the fact that the ninth child of a poor weaver living in the Tenements on the Brechin Road became a great writer, and described his birthplace in his books.

Ten children in all were born to David Barrie and his wife—known even to her family by her maiden name of Margaret Ogilvy, in accordance with an old Scots custom. Of these ten, three were boys. Two of the girls died in infancy nine years before James was



BARRIE'S BIRTHPLACE, KIRRIEMUIR

born. Of the other five, only Jane Ann Adamson Barrie, the third of the family, enters much into her youngest brother's story. But James's brothers—the one directly, the other in the most roundabout of ways —shaped his career. Alexander, the eldest, was senior to James by eighteen years and looked after his education. David, the second brother, was killed on the eve of his fourteenth birthday. James was seven at the time, and his feeling for his mother, already profound, was deepened by the sight of her unassuageable grief until it became the great passion of his life and the acknowledged inspiration of all the best of his work as a novelist.

David Barrie, the father, was a little better off than most of the weaving community, and his house in the Tenements was a good one by their standards. But the most that a hand-loom weaver could earn in a week was little more than a pound, and the house, though better than the ordinary weaver's two-roomed cottage (in the Scots phrase, a but-and-ben) had only four small low rooms.

Money went much farther in those days than it will now, but the achievement of David and Margaret Barrie in bringing up a large family in such conditions with a high standard of self-respect was something on the heroic scale. David does not figure largely in his son's writings, though he is always spoken of with respect when he does appear; but it is clear that he was a man of great force of character. He had little education himself as a young man, but he had a great veneration for learning. Not only did he determine that his sons should somehow have the advantages that he had himself missed, no matter what sacrifice that might entail upon himself; he also contrived, in such

spare time as he could get, to acquire for himself a considerable culture.

He had his reward. His son Alexander, a man of similar temper to his own, went to Aberdeen University and had a brilliant scholastic career. And David himself, when he was fifty-six and his young son James was still only a child of ten, was able to adapt himself so well to the new conditions brought in by the introduction of the power-loom that instead of being compelled, like many other hand-loom weavers, to yield up his position as bread-winner to his daughters, he found himself appointed to a position in the counting-house. His days of grinding economy were behind him for ever. Until that time came, however, David divided his time between his loom and his books, and may perhaps have seemed a withdrawn and formidable figure to a sensitive little boy.

David Barrie was a pillar of the South Free Church, and here the family worshipped. Margaret Ogilvy had been born into another Communion, the Auld Lichts, who were the strictest and poorest sect of all those into which the Presbyterian Church of Scotland had split after the Secession of 1733, and the keenest heresy-hunters. Margaret left them on her marriage, and it was entirely by hearsay from her that James got his knowledge of them. It is odd to reflect that he never in his life set foot in the Auld Licht Kirk in which his Little Minister preached and round which the lives of so many of his characters revolved.

Not much is known in detail of James's earliest years. James Robb, two years his junior, was one of his chief friends among the village boys, and the friendship between them endured all their lives; but though Robb

was ready to speak about their joint exploits as children, he put nothing on record that was thrilling or unexpected. Barrie was no infant prodigy. He played the usual games, got into the customary forms of mischief, and did not strike either his contemporaries or his family as being in any way remarkable. He was not even particularly small for his age at this time; nor had he developed the shyness that became characteristic later.

At the age of six or so he went to a school kept by two maiden ladies, daughters of a retired minister, Mr. Adam. This was obviously the original of the Hanky School in *Sentimental Tommy*, which was so called because at prayers the children were required to use their handkerchiefs as praying-mats. The rule was made in the interest not of the pupils' comfort but the preceptresses' carpet—though it must be a moot point whether a small boy's handkerchief is less likely than his knees to harm a precious fabric. This school did not pretend to offer very much in the way of teaching, and James did not stay there long. He went on to the South Free Church School, and there began his serious education. But as it turned out, his time here also was short. In 1867, Alexander Barrie, who since his graduation had been running a private school at Bothwell in Lanarkshire with the aid of his eldest sister Mary, was appointed classical master at Glasgow Academy. He was now in a position, by taking his little brother under his wing, both to direct the boy's studies and to help the family finances. Accordingly, James Barrie was entered in the school roll of Glasgow Academy on 19th August, 1868.

To leave home at the age of eight must have been a

wrench for him, for already his feeling for his mother had gone beyond the unthinking acceptance of early childhood. In the book that he wrote about her after her death, he tells, in a passage that has the print of sincerity in every line, how he first came to realize her, when he was six years old. To be precise, his age was six years and eight months on 29th January, 1867, when the news came that young David Barrie, who was at his brother Alexander's school at Bothwell, had fallen on the ice and had badly hurt his head. A second telegram, which reached the parents when they were waiting at the station for the train that was to take them to David's side, told them that the boy was dead. Perhaps he was Margaret's special pride among her children. At all events the shock of the news went near to killing her; and when she recovered from the long illness which followed upon it, she was no longer the woman she had been, but frailer and more frightened of the things that life could do to her. So it was that James first remembered her as a woman with a soft face and timid lips, and knew only from hearsay that there had been a time when her face was not so soft and her lips not timid at all.

This long illness determined the lives of two of Margaret Ogilvy's children. Her daughter Jane Ann, then a girl of not quite twenty, dedicated herself to her mother's service from that time, and never left her until, three days before Margaret's death, she died herself; and James, though necessity took him often from his mother's side, was in his own way even more deeply dedicated. It was Jane Ann who, coming from her mother's room with her face full of anxiety, told James to go in and say to Margaret that she still had

another son. The little boy paused inside the door, frightened by the darkness and the silence. He heard a listless voice say, "Is that you?" and, thinking she meant David, he said in a little lonely voice, "No, it's no him, it's just me." The wisest doctor in the world could have devised no better way of making her forget for a moment her own unhappiness. He heard a cry and, though it was too dark to see, he knew that she was holding out her arms to him.

From that moment he set himself to coax his mother back to her customary cheerfulness, and his efforts had about them a childish pathos that often left her between laughter and tears. If he saw anybody in the village do something that made others laugh, he ran to her room and did it before her. He kept a record of her laughs on a piece of paper, and a great moment came when, at the instigation of the doctor, he showed her the paper and told her what the strokes on it meant. She laughed twice then, once at his explanation and again when he entered a stroke for the first one. Slowly she got better, but ill or well she was from that time onwards his inspiration and his ideal. Going away to school only intensified his feeling, by making him more sharply aware of it.

Little is known of his Glasgow life. It lasted less than three years, and came to a natural end when Alexander Barrie resigned his mastership there. The Academy records show that James won a prize in his class and a prize for religious knowledge, and give a bare account of his attendances, but there is not one line in all his own writings which can be related to his Glasgow school life. It must, however, have been from Glasgow, during a school holiday, that he paid the momentous visit

recorded in *Margaret Ogilvy* when, at the age of eight or nine, he had his first taste of a way of living more spacious than his own. The relative he was visiting kept a servant, who was therefore to be James's servant also while he was a guest in the house. His relative met him at the station, a sister greeted him at the house door, but he chafed at every delay dictated by good manners, so eager was he to go into the kitchen and make sure that the servant really was there. Everything goes to show that this relative was Margaret Ogilvy's brother, David Ogilvy, a divine of some eminence (he was made a D.D. of Aberdeen on his retirement in 1896). He had a manse at Motherwell, near Glasgow; and the sister of the story was either Mary, the eldest, or perhaps Sara, now a girl of fifteen, who afterwards became her uncle's adopted daughter and was his housekeeper for many years.

Not long after this the Barries' own lives achieved a greater spaciousness. In 1870, David Barrie was at last rewarded for his years of patient self-education, and was given the post of factory clerk in Laird's Linen Works at Forfar. In May of that year the family removed from the cottage in the Tenements to another in the county town which, though it too had no more than four rooms, was altogether a grander affair. James was at home for this adventure, and made the journey perched on the cart that took the furniture. Margaret Ogilvy was not well enough to take any active part in the removal. She stayed with her lame neighbour, Bell Lunan (Mrs. Addison) for three weeks, and did not go to Forfar till her family had settled in.

For a year after this move James stayed on at Glâsgow Academy, which is a fairly clear indication that his

brother Alexander wanted to continue to keep an eye on him. But Alexander resigned his mastership at the Academy in June, 1871, and became an assistant inspector of schools connected with the Free Church of Scotland, probably with the prospect of getting a government inspectorship as soon as the new Education Act took effect. He still made Glasgow his headquarters, but his work took him about the country, and he was no longer able to look after his young brother. Accordingly, James went home and entered Forfar Academy. Exact dates are lacking here; but there is in existence a school photograph, taken at Forfar in the summer of 1871, which shows James and eighteen other boys grouped demurely in front of two top-hatted and ferociously hairy masters.

It is probable that James was sent to Forfar Academy merely as a temporary measure, till Alexander should have settled his own future. However that may be, he was not to stay there even so long as that. His father, who had proved a great success at his office job, was now given the appointment of confidential clerk at the Gairie Linen Works, the new firm which was bringing the power-loom to Kirriemuir, at Whitsuntide, 1872. Early in that year, therefore, the Barrie family went back to its native town, not to a cottage any more but to the upper part of an imposing new villa named Strathview.

It is not very important that we should know exactly how much schooling James Barrie got during this period, or where he got it. What is important, in the light of his later development, is that from the time he left Glasgow Academy till he joined his brother again at Dumfries he was living at home. This was a space of

two years, at what he has himself described as the most impressionable age of a boy's life, and the most vivid to look back on. During these two years his imagination was alive, alert and creative; and it had abundant material on which to thrive, for he was hearing from his mother the innumerable stories she had to tell of the Kirriemuir of her youth, out of which he later made his best novels. During these two years, also, he and she began to read together books borrowed from the library at a penny for three days, or bought by patient saving. He went about in a world of romance, out of which not even the fisherman's intentness on his prey could tempt him. He was now, as always, the keenest of anglers; but he lost trout because his mind was wandering when they nibbled. Boys who were his friends at the Forfar school remembered in after life how on their walks he would hold them entranced with stories told at enormous length and embroidered with minute detail.

Also, if we are to trust his own statement that it was in a garret that he first tasted blood, it must have been towards the end of these two years that he conceived the idea of putting down his stories on paper, for not until it moved into Strathview had the Barrie family possessed a garret that was habitable. To this apartment James retired to write tales of high and impossible adventure, into which no character was admitted whose counterpart he knew in real life. His heroine was borrowed from a series of magazine stories which had particularly caught his fancy. She was a seller of water-cress, and was all the more romantic in his eyes because he did not know what water-cress was. Later on, when he came to write in good earnest, he had learnt enough

to substitute the men of his own world for the knights on black chargers in these tales of wonder; but the water-cress lady kept her hold on his imagination. It took him years to get her out of his system, if indeed he ever did. But from the time he encountered her his mind was made up as to his future calling. Literature was his game.

Chapter III

SCHOOL AND COLLEGE

THIS first adventure into the literary life was brought to an end by the operation of the Education Act, under which in 1873 Alexander Barrie was appointed Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools for the Dumfries district, and took a house in that town with his sister Mary to look after him. Here, when the new school year began in the autumn, James joined him and was entered at Dumfries Academy, where he was to stay for five years.

The reason Barrie himself gave for writing no more stories at this time was that he went to a school where cricket and football were more esteemed. He might with equal truth have said that he had come to an age when cricket and football were more esteemed by him. All the evidence—and there is a good deal of it, one way and another—goes to show that during those important years of development he had little of the difficulty in joining in the life of a community which was increasingly his characteristic in after years, and that he lived a normal schoolboy's full and care-free life. He himself said, long after, that those five years at Dumfries were probably the happiest of his life.

This was perhaps due to a lucky accident. Like most shy people, Barrie responded easily to genuine friendliness in others. It was his great good fortune,

therefore, to make a life-long friend on his very first day at Dumfries Academy. This was a boy called Stuart Gordon, who came up to him in the playground, and, after a short, impromptu and mutually satisfactory examination in the works of Fenimore Cooper, told him he liked his cut, and enrolled him a member of his pirate crew. Gordon, whose father was Sheriff Clerk, lived in a house with a large garden on the banks of the Nith; and in this garden the pirate crew, night by night, enacted "a sort of Odyssey that was long afterwards to become the play of *Peter Pan*". Barrie's own accounts of this meeting differ in detail, as usual, but they agree in substance, and they show how he escaped the danger that overhangs a shy boy at a strange school, of failing to find kindred spirits and so being driven in upon himself.

So it came about quite naturally that, apart from the cricket and football, he was too busy living his stories to have time to write them. His chief recorded connexion with letters at this time is the fact that he kept the pirates' log-book. Later on, when he had outgrown piracy, he reached the age where self-consciousness deepens and self-criticism begins. At this age it is the habit of the schoolboy author-in-embryo to slake his passion for playing with words by taking what seems to other boys an unnatural interest in his set compositions in school and his letters to his friends out of it. If he "writes" at this stage, he does it in secret. Here Barrie's development was along completely normal lines, as is shown by a packet of his letters to a friend which has come to light. The friend, Peter Irving, had just left Dumfries Academy and gone into a lawyer's office in Edinburgh; and in the first letter Barrie, aged

fifteen, announces his progress from one Latin book to another with a clever boy's slightly ponderous humour:

> Balbus is no longer—he fell down from one of those eternal walls and broke his back (at last) Caius has fled from the city for good and all, Cæsar and Phæthon have retired into private life, Pyramus has got thirty days for stealing a gold watch (I'm afraid he was a bad lot) and Thisbe has committed suicide (hanged herself with the garden rake).
> Virgil and Sallust rule triumphant now . . .

After more of this, he goes on in a more ordinary style to record the splendid fun he had had in the holidays, and to recount the average number of fish he had caught. And in a postscript marked "Private" he adds a typical bit of schoolboy scandal: "Dunbar *is* going it with the girls this year out walks nearly every night with them especially Minnie Jocelyn. You are not to mention I told you this to any one *here*." But throughout this earliest extant specimen of Barrie's writing, as in all that follow, is the sense that he enjoys writing for its own sake. The craftsman is already at work polishing his set of tools, though he has no idea yet what use he is going to make of them. It is no surprise to learn from a letter in the following year that he has had highest marks in the English Literature paper, or from one written a year later still that he expects to get an essay prize. In fact, there is talent in every one of these letters, though not a single premonitory spark of genius. What is more, the letters show him joining in every sort of activity in school and out. He takes part in the discussions of the debating society, but likes best of all "the monthly meetings for recitations, readings, &c. I gave one thing

at one of them, 'The Stuttering Minister's Speech', which rather took." He is reading Ballantyne and Jules Verne. He is going to see *As You Like It* and Sanger's Circus. He and a boy called C. Wilson walk to Carlisle and get a paragraph in the paper under the heading "Plucky Pedestrians". He goes to Kirriemuir for the holidays (staying at Pathhead Farm—the original of T'nowhead in the Thrums books—evidently because now that his home was with his brother at Dumfries, there was no bed for him at Strathview), and is uncertain whether the better way of spending a Saturday is to fish in a burn depleted by drought, or watch Kirriemuir play Dundee at cricket.

These are remarkable letters because, and only because, they would not have been remarkable if they had been written by Dunbar, or C. Wilson, or any of the other boys mentioned in them. And they explain how it came about that when one of those boys, Wellwood Anderson, started an Amateur Dramatic Club, Barrie was not only one of the first members to be enrolled, but entered with zest into the preparations for the first public performance. In one of the letters (undated—but it must have been written in the autumn term of 1876) he says: "You really must excuse me, but I have never been so busy since I came here." The reason is "rehersals", at which "we have good fun". The play is *Paul Pry*, in which W. Anderson is playing the name-part, and has bought a wig for 13*s.* 4*d.* Barrie has invested 13*d.* in whiskers, and paid the "enormous sum of 2*s.* 6*d*", for an engine-driver's hat. The public performance is looming near, for the first dress rehearsal is to be held that very night, and Barrie hopes to be able to enclose a programme before he shuts his envelope.

That programme, if Peter Irving ever got it, would show that the entertainment in prospect was a triple bill, in which the first play was to be Clement Scott's *Off the Line*—for which, no doubt, the engine-driver required his half-crown hat, and perhaps also thirteen pennyworth of whisker. It would also give Peter Irving two interesting pieces of information not included in the letter. One was that in *Paul Pry*, the last play of the three, Barrie was to get into skirts and play Phœbe.[1] The other was that the middle play was to be *Bandelero the Bandit*, Barrie's own first effort as a dramatist. Nearly fifty years later, Barrie volunteered some amusing but entirely untrustworthy information concerning this composition, in which, he said, he himself played a part compounded of all his favourite characters in fiction, entailing so many changes of clothes that he was hardly ever on the stage.

He was now an author confessed, and though he did not attempt the dramatic form again while he was at school, he tried his hand at both prose and verse, in a manuscript magazine called *The Clown* which Wellwood Anderson brought out. To this he contributed *Reckolections of a Skoolmaster, Edited by James Barrie, M.A., A.S.S., LL.D.*, which ran through four numbers. Also, in secret, he wrote—or, to be quite precise, has several times said that he wrote, for here no corroboration is possible—a vast novel called *A Child of Nature*, full of cynicism and impassioned love-scenes. He sent it to a publisher, who thought it was the work of a clever lady and offered to publish it for £100. Meanwhile, tradition says, the young author actually got his first taste of

[1] Dumfries Academy was a mixed school, but no doubt it was unthinkable in 1876 that the girls should act with the boys.

print by reporting his school cricket matches for the local papers.

It was in the second year of the Dramatic Society, and Barrie's last at school, that the famous performance of *The Weavers* was given. This too was part of a triple bill, one of the other plays being *The Shufflerig Party*, in which Barrie played the Rev. Heavycloud Weatherdull; and it is worth recording that in this part he sent his audience into fits of laughter by that same solemnity which was later his great asset as a public speaker. The date of this event, the last of his school career of which we have any exact knowledge, was March, 1878.

In one of the Peter Irving letters, written from Pathhead, Kirriemuir, in the summer holiday of 1876, Barrie says that he *thinks* he will be going back to Dumfries for another year at school, and that if he does he will have to work hard as he is likely to go on to " Aberdeen College ", which had been his brother Alexander's University. In actual fact, as we have seen, he went back for two more years. Why the idea of Aberdeen was given up and Edinburgh substituted is not known, but a reason can be suggested. We know from *Margaret Ogilvy* that Barrie's expressed intention of becoming a writer was received by his parents at first with amused indulgence, which deepened into alarm as time went on and his purpose held. We know that his mother gave up with reluctance her dream of seeing her youngest son a minister or a professor, and that her sympathy with and pride in his writing was a thing of slow growth. It is possible, therefore, that in this letter's uncertainty whether he is going back to school even for another year, and in the subsequent change of plans concerning

College, we have echoes of the family arguments which must have been going on at this time concerning Barrie's future.

It can be only a guess, but it is a guess that fits the facts, that Barrie's own idea was to leave school in 1876 and begin fitting himself at once for a writing career; that his family, fighting a rearguard action to save what could be saved of their own plans, managed to persuade him to go to College and take his degree; and that he then decided to go to Edinburgh in order to study English Literature under David Masson. This guess is supported by a remark made by Barrie himself in *An Edinburgh Eleven*, written six years after his graduation: "Though a man might, to my mind, be better employed than in going to College, it is his own fault if he does not strike on someone there who sends his life off at a new angle." He goes on to say that in his case the someone was Masson.

If this was in fact the idea, it was amply justified by events. Professor Masson was a fine man and a great teacher, and his influence on his pupils was profound. It is difficult to believe that those four years could really have been "better employed", even though it may have seemed to the twenty-eight-year-old Barrie, looking back, that it had been a great waste to have spent half his life as an intellectual adult in grinding economy and hard work for a degree which was never to be any practical use to him. He spent those four years in constant and leisured contact with a man who not merely wrote well himself but was the cause of good writing in others. And Barrie—the young Barrie—needed guidance. He had great facility, which might have been fatal to him if it had got out of hand. As

Stevenson saw, there was a journalist at Barrie's elbow even when he did begin his career. Without Masson's influence that journalist might have taken charge so completely that the deeper Barrie, of whom we confidently use the word " genius ", might have been hard put to it to contend with him.

So far as the chronicling of plain facts is concerned, there is little to say of Barrie's University career. He made no personal mark at Edinburgh as he had at Dumfries. He did not shine particularly as a scholar, though he always did well in his English Literature papers, and excited Masson's personal interest.

In *An Edinburgh Eleven* he has sketched in the background against which his life was lived at this period. These character-studies of the outstanding figures of his University give us glimpse after glimpse of the students' conditions, which formed a combination of plain living and high thinking unknown in English college life. He tells of students so poor that they played Box and Cox in their lodgings, one reading while the other slept, so as to avoid paying for two beds. He tells of students who died under the strain of semi-starvation and overwork. He shows us the gaiety of youth rising superior to hardship, he tells us of " rags " and the battle of wits eternally waged between professor and pupil. But of himself and the part he played in these matters he says hardly a word. These were the years which turned him from boy to man, but only by inference and guesswork can we trace that development.

Yet when the inferences all lead clearly in the same direction, the guesswork can be done with confidence. One marked change that these years brought to Barrie was the growth in him of that acute shyness which was

characteristic for the rest of his life. By the end of 1880, this had taken such a hold of him that when his sister Isabella married Dr. Murray in the Christmas vacation of that year, and a wedding-party was given at Strathview, James could not at first be induced to appear at all. At last he yielded to great pressure and came in long enough to recite, with intense dramatic fervour, *The Dream of Eugene Aram*—a delightful period touch, this. As soon as the performance was over, without speaking a word to anybody, he departed and was no more seen.

If a happy schoolboy, at ease among his fellows, can be so quickly transformed into a violently self-conscious young man, he must have been subjected to some very powerful influence. What was this influence? No easy theory will do, such as the one hitherto found sufficient, that Barrie has been working hard at College and so has formed, all of a sudden, the habits of a recluse. For one thing, there is no evidence that he worked particularly hard for his degree; for another, the effect is out of all proportion to the cause.

A much stronger, simpler and more satisfying reason for the change in him can be suggested. At school, where he had his assured position as a senior and prominent member of the community, and where he was surrounded by boys and girls of all sizes and ages, the fact that as time went on he grew no bigger would be taken for granted both by the boys and the girls. In fact, the only proof on record how the girls in the Academy regarded him is his own story that they held a plebiscite to decide which boy in the school had the sweetest smile, and that he headed the poll. But when he left, and joined a community of adult strangers, his

small size must at once have made him conspicuous in a way that rankled, and was to go on rankling, in his mind for many years to come. All at once he became aware that he was, to use his own words, " as thin as a pencil but not so long ".

This phrase comes in *The Greenwood Hat*, where Barrie is describing his twenty-seven-year-old self, " James Anon ", on the way from Scotland to St. Pancras to deliver his assault on London. He follows it with another illuminating sentence: " Ladies have decided that he is of no account, and he already knows this and has private anguish thereanent." Later in the same book he elaborates this description: " In short Mr. Anon, that man of secret sorrows, found it useless to love, because, after one look at the length and breadth of him, none would listen." And the best proof that this sensitiveness about his lack of inches had already begun while he was at College is to be found in *An Edinburgh Eleven*, in the character-sketch of the great Professor of Greek, John Stuart Blackie. Out of his enormous class of students the Professor would ask a small number to breakfast, choosing his guests apparently at haphazard, since they were distinguished neither scholastically nor socially. It was Barrie who saw that the only thing the Professor's choices had in common was the possession of some physical peculiarity which had happened to strike his notice.[1]

As for the development of Barrie's writing at this time, that can be judged only by its results in after

[1] A sentence which may be significant in this connexion occurs in the speech made by Barrie in 1930, when he was made Chancellor of his old University. Referring to the lack, in his day, of such things as hostels and unions for students, and the social atmosphere they give, he said: " The absence of them maimed some of us for life."

years. He wrote nothing at the University which has survived. On the other hand, it was during these years that he learnt to write. He learnt, as most other authors have had to learn, by that weary system of trial and error which at the beginning consists almost entirely of error. Essays on "deeply uninteresting subjects", a volume on the older satirists, a story about Mary, Queen of Scots—all these were projected or begun. By this time, we must suppose, his mother had come round completely to the idea that he must be an author, so that he no longer needed to conceal his ambitions for fear of hurting her. About this time it must have been that he had a conversation with her that was to prove strangely prophetic. He had discovered somewhere a dictum that a novelist who knows himself and one woman really well is better equipped for his labours than most. He talked this over with his mother, who remarked that he already had half the necessary qualification, as he knew himself; and then they laughed together over the ludicrous notion that as she was the only woman he knew well, he must make her his heroine.

So he groped his way forward, writing nothing that anybody wanted to print except some dramatic criticisms for *The Evening Courant*. These can have brought him in little money and less fame, but they were immensely valuable to him all the same. Not only did they give him useful practice in journalism; they enabled him to go more regularly to the theatre than his pocket would have allowed, and to indulge his love for and increase his knowledge of the stage. His interest in the theatre was always a practical thing. Even as a schoolboy visiting the little theatre in Dumfries, he always tried to get a seat at the side so as to rid himself of

stage illusion and watch what was going on in the wings; and later in life, while he seldom went to see a play, he was always interested in rehearsals. This pre-occupation with the process of manufacture rather than the finished article is most significant.

He took his degree on 21st April, 1882, but he returned to Edinburgh after the summer vacation to look about him for work, and to use the University Library for his book on the satirists, which was to begin with Skelton and Tom Nash, and which actually was half-written before its author found something of more immediate importance to do. The unfinished manuscript lay about for years as a dusty memento of a venture into the academic side of literature for which he had no real bent, and which he was never to repeat.

It is easy enough to see why he started out on it. The worship of erudition for its own sake, a common Scots characteristic which his father and elder brother possessed in more than common measure; his four years' sojourn in scholastic surroundings and his personal admiration for Masson—all these were influences strong enough to impose upon him a sense that his passion to write ought not to make him waste his scholarship. All about him were people who believed that in the domain of letters it was better to know things than to do things —people who would have seen nothing odd in the shocked exclamation of a maiden lady whom he told, about this time, that he was to be an author. She flung up her hands and said: "And you an M.A.!"

In fact, education had now done all it could for him, and it was high time for him to migrate to another world, where it mattered nothing to anybody whether he was an M.A. or not. Some such reflection must

have passed through the mind of John Morley, who, having the young aspirant presented to him, asked what sort of things he proposed to write. Barrie mentioned three subjects, *The History of Universities*, *A Life of William Cobbett*, and (of course) *The Early British Satirists*. Morley " decided that the young man was too grave a character to make a living out of literature ". It was a very natural decision, and we have good cause to be thankful that it was a wrong one.

Chapter IV

JOURNALISM

IF Barrie's family had been reconciled with difficulty to the idea of his writing for a living, they made amends now. His mother was already quite won over, and was sharing with mingled pride and trepidation his most ambitious plans. And his sister Jane Ann actually gave him his start. She found an advertisement in a paper, and suggested that her young brother should answer it. He did so, backing his application with a testimonial from Masson, and was promptly engaged as leader-writer on *The Nottingham Journal*. The salary was £3 a week, which he and the rest of the family thought an enormous sum; and, what was more, it was to begin at once. In the midst of his joyful preparations for his journey, however, it suddenly occurred to him that leaders were things that he had always skipped, and that consequently he knew neither how they were written nor what they were about. He need not have been disturbed, if he had only known. His intensive practice in writing essays on deeply uninteresting subjects was just the training he needed for the task (indeed, when asked to send a specimen of his work he submitted a treatise on *King Lear*). However, this was a discovery he had yet to make for himself, and meanwhile he collected all the newspapers in the house—from the linings of boxes, from under the carpet,

from down the chimney—and sat down to learn his job.

Once in Nottingham, where he arrived early in January, 1883, and over his first strangeness — of which we get a full account in Rob Angus's arrival at Silchester in *When a Man's Single*—he settled down quickly into the collar. What he had wanted was a chance to work, and now he had it in full measure. He was expected to write twelve columns a week. Besides his daily leaders, which were never less than a column in length and might run to two or more, he contributed a weekly article and a weekly column of random notes to the paper, and filled up the required measure with book reviews. Such practice was exactly what he needed. To write all day and every day, with the knowledge that what he wrote was going to be printed and published whether it was good or bad, was an admirable tonic after his experience as a free-lance, trying his luck with contributions that were all misfits. All through his time at Nottingham, which he afterwards used to speak of as a year, but was in fact nearly two, he kept up this enormous output.

The Nottingham Journal was a casually run paper, and, though its circulation did not enable it to aim at a very exalted standard, it prided itself on having a literary flavour. This was very fortunate for Barrie, for it enabled him to write of subjects familiar to him. The line that separates the aspiring amateur writer from the professional is often very fine indeed. A man may find that he has crossed that line unconsciously almost overnight; and once the professional certainty of touch has come to him, he finds that many of his amateurish efforts, which editors have scorned, only need rewriting in the light of his new knowledge to be acceptable.

This now happened to Barrie. One of his earliest signed contributions to his paper (he used the pen-name "Hippomenes" as his signature) was *The Complete Playgoer*, a satire in dramatic form which appeared in three parts. Hammerton, who ran this to earth in the files of the paper, describes it as "quite the crudest and most amateurish thing" that Barrie printed. Yet it may have had some success locally; for when, in the summer of 1883, the *Journal* published a serial story called *Vagabond Students* in its weekly supplements, the advertisements proclaimed that it was by the author of *The Complete Playgoer*. The first of these compositions was published almost immediately after Barrie's arrival in Nottingham; the second deals with the adventures of some students of "a Northern University" during the Long Vacation. It is therefore not so much a guess as a certainty that Barrie brought both these manuscripts with him in his box when he came South.

Others of his weekly signed articles show signs of having been conceived in the academic rather than the journalistic atmosphere. An essay on *Lear's Fool*, for example, is exactly the kind of thing that might be suggested by some casual remark of Masson's in the lecture-room, but has an air of unexpectedness in the columns of a small provincial daily paper. It must have given him a feeling of satisfaction to know that the days of his apprenticeship had not been entirely without practical use. Meanwhile, he was getting the majority of his subjects from the world about him, and developing the true journalist's knack of being able to turn out a readable article on anything or nothing. He had at all times a prodigious capacity for hard work and this enabled him to keep up with his task; but

never can three pounds a week have been much more thoroughly earned in the history of newspapers. He also put into the paper a comedietta called *Caught Napping*.[1]

His industry was not appreciated, however. H. G. Hibbert, who afterwards made a name in London as a writer of gossip about the stage, was sub-editor of *The Nottingham Journal* at the time, and has given an account of the paper and Barrie's connexion with it. Actually, the *Journal* was being allowed to die by its two owners, who had inherited it from their father without inheriting his enthusiasm. (It was amalgamated with *The Nottingham Express* in 1887.) There was no editor, and Hibbert, made responsible at the age of twenty for the make-up of the paper, found himself entirely at the mercy of the real autocrat of the office, the foreman printer—the original of Penny in *When a Man's Single*. This man divided all "copy" into two categories. There was news, and there was "tripe". News had to go in; "tripe"—which included everything that Barrie contributed—had to take its chance. According to Hibbert, Barrie took his work with great seriousness and suffered horribly under this treatment.

Hibbert's home was in Nottingham, and his mother befriended Barrie. His account, though it is too floridly written to be trustworthy in small detail, and though it shows the gossip's desire to tell a good story rather than the historian's determination to get at the truth, is really the only responsible first-hand evidence of Barrie's

[1] This is almost certainly the play mentioned in Hibbert's *Fifty Years of a Londoner's Life* as having been written for Minnie Palmer, although the title is there given conjecturally as *Polly's Dilemma*. A copy of *Caught Napping* came recently into the market and agrees with Hibbert's description in several striking details.

life in Nottingham that we have, and it must be given due consideration. According to him, Barrie had an immense sense of his importance, due not to vanity but a natural feeling of superiority to his surroundings. He was shy, and painfully sensitive; yet—a touch that matches exactly with the account of his behaviour at his sister's wedding—he rather fancied himself as an actor, and on the slightest provocation would give an imitation of Irving as Romeo and Modjeska as Juliet. He had an exquisite delicacy with regard to women. He drank nothing. He made no friends, and was morbidly unhappy all his time on the *Journal*.

This may be an absolutely true record. It is easily possible that among the easy-going, rather raffish group of young men who staffed the three local newspapers Barrie may have felt too strange and miserable to look for a congenial spirit. Yet one of those young men was Barrie's life-long friend, T. L. Gilmour, who appears as Gilray in *My Lady Nicotine* and under his own name in *The Greenwood Hat*. He was on the *Journal* with Barrie, and since three years or so later they were to share lodgings in London, it seems reasonable to suppose that their friendship may have begun now.

One thing is certain, however. Happy or unhappy, standoffish or shy, proud or humble, Barrie never regarded Nottingham as anything but a place where he could sharpen his weapons for the assault on London. As soon as practice enabled him to turn out his weekly twelve columns without completely exhausting his energy and his stock of subjects, he began to spend his spare time writing articles intended for any London paper that would take them. Frederick Greenwood of *The St. James's Gazette* showed an interest in his work,

but his first acceptance came from another editor when, on 9th August, 1884, W. T. Stead of *The Pall Mall Gazette* printed an article of his called *The Manufacture of Penny Numbers: By a Manufacturer.* It came just in time to give him encouragement, for a few months later his engagement with *The Nottingham Journal* was terminated, and he went back to Scotland to become once more, and to remain, a free-lance. It has usually been assumed that Barrie resigned his post in order to go up to London and try his luck, but this can now be conclusively shown to be wrong. Hibbert, who was on the spot, has no doubt that Barrie was "sacked", though he is vague about the reason, suggesting at one moment that Barrie was considered to be writing above the heads of the local readers, at another that he chose a tactless moment to ask for a rise in pay, and at yet another that he was a victim of the proprietors' decision to do without a leader-writer in future, and to buy their editorial opinions from an agency at three-and-six a column. In corroboration of Hibbert's belief is the attested fact that at some time while he was at Nottingham Barrie applied, unsuccessfully, for a vacant assistant-editorship on *The Liverpool Daily Post.* In the absence of exact dates, it is a permissible guess that he applied as soon as he knew that he was not to stay with *The Nottingham Journal.*

At any rate, sacked or not, he left Nottingham in the autumn of 1884, and made no move towards London until the following spring. Hammerton, who was editor of *The Nottingham Express* ten years later, long after it had swallowed the *Journal,* made a thorough search of the files of the old paper, and gives 27th October as the last date on which Barrie contributed to it. Almost

immediately afterwards, on 8th November, a very lively article appeared in F. W. Robinson's weekly, *Home Chimes*, signed J. M. Barrie and entitled *A Night in a Provincial Newspaper Office*. This was the first contribution bearing his name that ever appeared in a London paper, and its appearance must have been an epoch-making event for him. Probably it meant much more to him at the time than the anonymous publication, nine days later, of a contribution to *The St. James's Gazette*; but to the older Barrie, looking back on this exciting time, it was clear that the second article was in truth the epoch-making event. It was called *An Auld Licht Community*, and it represents Barrie's earliest realization—which came to him, in his own phrase, as unlooked for as a telegram—that there might be something worth writing about in his native place.

Where and when this idea, which was to carry him to fame and fortune, actually came to him is a puzzle which we can solve only conjecturally. Barrie himself confuses the issue hopelessly, for in *Margaret Ogilvy*, writing with the idea of simplifying this part of his life into a few sentences, he makes two irreconcilable statements. One is that it was nearly eighteen months after beginning his leader-writing that he had his inspiration. The other is that he sent his mother a copy of the paper containing *An Auld Licht Community* a few days afterwards. If the first statement is true, Barrie thought of the article in Nottingham somewhere about July, and either he or Greenwood was very slow with it. If the second, he thought of it after he had got back to Scotland, wrote it at white-heat, and did indeed, as he says, see it in print in a few days. The second version of this story seems to me so much the more likely that I

reject that "nearly eighteen months" with no misgiving at all; Barrie is never so misleading as when he is being vaguely particular about dates, though he is usually to be trusted when he gives a date precisely. It may be objected that if he was back in Scotland he would not have needed to *send* the article to his mother, since he could show it to her. The answer to that is that on leaving Nottingham he probably went not to Kirriemuir but to Dumfries, to his brother's house, which was still his home. Certainly it was from Dumfries that he left for London in the following March.

The odd thing is that when Barrie sent off his first Auld Licht article he thought that he had exhausted the subject, and next tried Greenwood with something different. Greenwood rejected it, but softened the blow with the remark: "I liked that Scotch thing—any more of those?" Almost immediately, of course, some more of those Scotch things were forthcoming. Meanwhile, *Home Chimes* had taken a couple of short stories, and Barrie began to wonder whether the moment for going boldly to London had not arrived. He had a little money in hand, saved from his Nottingham salary, and he was confident of his ability to live, if need be, on a pound a week. Some time in March he wrote to Greenwood, asking him for advice on the point, and promising to abide by his decision. Greenwood advised him to stay where he was for the present, and within a week Barrie packed the stout wooden box which had seen his uncle, his brother and himself through their University careers, and took train for St. Pancras on the night of 28th March, 1885.

He describes his arrival at the end of that journey next morning as the romance of his life. Here he was

at last in London, the city he knew almost by heart from the maps he had pored over with his mother when they discussed his future, always with an uneasy look at the green patch marking Hyde Park, where unsuccessful authors from the country were understood [1] to pass their nights shivering on the seats. But not only that. As he dragged his big box to the left-luggage office his eye fell on a placard of *The St. James's Gazette.* It read, "The Rooks Begin to Build," which was the title of an article Barrie had posted from Dumfries a few days before. It was an omen. London had welcomed him, and he went off with a high heart to find a room near the Museum, in which he intended to do much reading—and which he was destined never to enter for that purpose—and to buy a top hat in which to approach Greenwood. This hat was religiously used for its appointed purpose and for no other, except to give a name, forty-five years later, to its owner's last book.

Before noon on that day, he says, he sat down at his desk (which had "the size and methods of a concertina") to begin four years of the most ferocious hard work that ever a free-lance writer went through. His own estimate is that he wrote something over eight hundred articles in that time, of which one hundred and forty were accepted in the first two years. He mentions casually two 20,000-word stories, also, which brought him three guineas apiece. He went through a lean time to begin with, for after his initial success with the Rooks, he wrote fourteen rejected articles before finding acceptance with one called *Better Dead,* but he was never in any danger of occupying one of those dreaded seats in the Park. And by the time two years

[1] Erroneously, of course. Nobody passes the night in Hyde Park.

were up he must have been within sight of that ambition, so high that the young man who arrived at St. Pancras hardly dared formulate it even to himself, of some day earning a pound a day. Greenwood and Robinson of *Home Chimes* continued to take a good deal of his work, and outside London he soon found a ready market in *The Edinburgh Evening Dispatch*. He got his connexion with this paper through Alexander Riach, its London correspondent, who was also on the staff of *The Daily Telegraph* and had become one of Barrie's earliest and best personal friends. When Riach was made editor and went back to Edinburgh, Barrie's contributions to his paper became regular and frequent.

Just after the first two years in London were up, two things happened which made 1887 a memorable year for Barrie. Robertson Nicoll, who had founded *The British Weekly* in the previous year, saw an article of his in *The Edinburgh Evening Dispatch* and invited him to become one of his own contributors; and Barrie published his first book, *Better Dead*, which came out in November, 1887, though it is dated 1888 on the title-page. These two events, in themselves unconnected, have a considerable joint significance. They mark very definitely the end of one period in Barrie's development as a writer and the beginning of another.

The point is this. Barrie's claim to greatness as a writer lies in an ability, peculiar to himself, to mix satire, sentiment and humour. Only at the times when the three elements mix in exactly true proportion can he do his truest and finest work. In all his early writings the most characteristic of these three elements, sentiment, is rigorously excluded. He knew how strong it was in him, and he distrusted his ability to control it. In that

character-sketch of his young self in *The Greenwood Hat* from which I have already quoted is the pregnant statement that James Anon " hates sentiment as a slave may hate his master ". Against this tyrant his best protection was satire, and therefore in these early years the more satirical he was the safer he felt. This, I suggest, is the reason, which in after life he failed to discover for himself, why the coldest, emptiest and most completely unfeeling of all his satirical ideas should have appealed to him as being worth expanding into a book. *Better Dead* is a very small volume, published at a shilling. It begins in Scotland—not at Thrums, but at Wheens—with a chapter in which Barrie carefully makes fun of everything that is nearest to his heart. Then it brings the hero to London, and involves him in the doings of a society for murdering any citizen who has come under its notice as having made himself a public nuisance. The book is written in short, jerky, snip-snap sentences as unlike Barrie's later style as can be imagined. Satire is there in abundance, humour in plenty. Sentiment is not so much absent as outlawed. And the whole is a negligible little book, which was published at the author's expense and lost him £25. It was the first and last time that he ever wrote, in book or play, of Scottish scenes and characters without that warm feeling which came later to be the hall-mark of all his best work.

His attempt to keep sentiment at bay was unconsciously helped by London editors, who did not share Greenwood's liking for " those Scotch things ", or feared the effect of dialect upon their readers. In writing for them, accordingly, he dealt with day-to-day matters about which he had no deep feelings, and could

adopt a cheerfully flippant tone. Also, though he had gathered together the best of his descriptive articles and anecdotes about the Auld Lichts in the hope that he might find a publisher for them, nobody would have them even as a gift. Robertson Nicoll altered all this. As the editor of a weekly which combined the interests of literature and nonconformist religion, he drew a very large proportion of his public from Scotland and the North, so that he was ready to let Barrie write of and for his own people. And as the adviser to a great publishing house, he was ready to take up the despised bundle of articles and see that a book was made of them. The results were that Barrie, without dropping his connexion with Greenwood or Riach, was able to create an entirely new literary personality in Gavin Ogilvy of *The British Weekly*; and that in April, 1888, *Auld Licht Idylls* was published, was greeted with a chorus of praise by English and Scottish reviewers alike, and settled down to be a success with the public. It was dedicated—and it might well be—to Greenwood.

Admirable though the book is, it is still the work of a man afraid of himself, for there is little sentiment in *Auld Licht Idylls*. The only sketch in it which appeals to the sense of pity is the description of Cree Queery and Mysy Drolly his mother. It is written in a dry detached manner, suitable to the middle-aged schoolmaster who is supposed to be the narrator; and its quality lies in descriptive power and humorous observation. There is much understanding of the Auld Lichts, those grim and difficult people, but not a line of flattery. It is no wonder that Margaret Ogilvy, instead of showing the book proudly in Kirriemuir as the author pictured her, hid it close. This is the first book of which Thrums

is the scene, and Barrie indicates by this name that he is referring not to the whole town, but to that small part of it where the weaving community dwelt. "Thrums" is a weaver's word, meaning the fringe of threads left on a loom when the web is taken off. Later on, when Barrie went on from description to invention, he used the name to mean the whole town, though even so he took his humbler characters from the corner of it that he knew best.

With the introduction of Thrums to the bookshelves, Barrie ceased to be simply a journalist. He still wrote for the papers, it is true. Indeed, he wrote for them more prolifically than ever. But he wrote with the knowledge that the manufacture of lively squibs about shoes and ships and sealing-wax was not to be his life's work.

Chapter V

THE FIRST NOVELS

ONCE Robertson Nicoll had appeared on the scene, Barrie's career went swiftly forward. Even before *Auld Licht Idylls* was through the press, its author had taken advantage of his newly-won security of tenure on *The British Weekly* to write his first long connected story—if we except his three-guinea pot-boilers—and to publish it serially in that paper. This story was *When a Man's Single*. It is an imperfect but delightful piece of work, and its very faults give it added interest. Except for its love-story, it is very largely autobiographical. The career of Rob Angus, the gigantic literary saw-miller of Thrums (who has a casual mention in *Auld Licht Idylls*, by the way), follows almost exactly the career of his creator. Rob gets a post as leader-writer on a provincial paper, *The Silchester Mirror*, whose likeness to *The Nottingham Journal* is striking and complete. From there he goes to London as a free-lance, and after a period of loneliness and disappointment finds friends among his own kind and a livelihood. Finally, he achieves success.

Most of the faults and some of the virtues of *When a Man's Single* are due to the method of its composition. Robertson Nicoll must have accepted the story on the strength of the opening Thrums chapters and Barrie's outline of the rest of the story, for publication actually

began when only three chapters had been written, and very soon the author was only a chapter ahead. In such circumstances, it is fairly easy for an author who is also a journalist of experience to make sure of delivering his "copy" by the appointed time; but it is impossible for him to give any kind of guarantee as to quality. *When a Man's Single* bears many traces of hasty writing and ramshackle construction. It suffers often from the fact that its author could not cast back and alter his earlier chapters, since those chapters were already in the hands of his readers when the later ones were being written. But the very fact that it had to be written swiftly and urgently has given it a liveliness and a sense of youthful vitality which might have been lost with too careful revision.

The artistic importance of the book consists in the Thrums chapters, for here we get the first glimpse of the real Barrie, not simply a clever journalist with a gift of humour but a great writer. Here at last he has the courage to let his soft heart rather than his hard head guide the hand that holds his pen. The account of little Davy Dundas trotting so purposefully to her death is not very well designed. Not only has it little or nothing to do with the story that is to follow, but it does not even explain with any clearness how the child died. Nevertheless, here for the first time we have the authentic tone of that Barrie who at his best could wring our hearts as could no other writer of his time. Nobody of judgment who read those chapters could doubt the quality of the man who wrote them, or that the subsequent story tacked on to them so arbitrarily was the work of somebody perhaps more expert but much less significant.

To the biographer, however, the chief immediate interest of the book lies in the story of Rob Angus after he has left Scotland. The Silchester chapters, which are still read with special admiration for their clear and humorous observation of journalistic life by every journalist who comes across them, also show us the difficulties of a youth, at once crude and sensitive, in the process of having his corners rubbed off. The London chapters must be read in double harness, so to speak, with *The Greenwood Hat* if we are to realize how freely the author has drawn upon personal experience for his detail.

This was natural—indeed, it was almost inevitable. It was the essence of the story that Rob Angus must love and marry a woman far above him in social position. Once committed to the creation of Mary Abinger, Barrie had to supply her with a background; and so few glimpses had he had by that time of the world inhabited by the Mary Abingers that he was compelled to put into the picture almost everything that he had seen. For instance, his friend Gilmour and he had hired a house-boat at Tagg's Island in the Thames, where he had stayed for a month or more having his first taste of the gay life; so to Tagg's Island all his characters must go, whether they wanted to or not, since if they decided on any other resort their creator would not be able to provide for their entertainment. Rob's emotions on his first sight of Fleet Street, his gradual absorption into the easy, friendly bachelor life of the men of his own craft, his assimilation of a new code of manners, all may be taken as being equally true of Barrie. Alexander Riach of the *Telegraph* appears in the story thinly disguised as John Rorrison of the *Wire*, and it is probable

that Barrie got his passport to Bohemia from Riach in much the same way as Rob got it from Rorrison.[1] The small boy who brings the school captain home for the holidays appears both in Rob Angus's story and in Barrie's autobiography, and so does the cow which, in those comparatively sylvan days, inhabited Tagg's Island.

Another fact, implicit in *When a Man's Single* but explicitly stated in *The Greenwood Hat*, is that Barrie's widening knowledge of the world still included no knowledge of women. During his own interlude at Tagg's Island, Barrie had written a series of articles in the *St. James's* describing the place, its life and its inhabitants; and in the evenings he would sit in a little inn (he " was on the verge of beer " by this time) listening to the youths from other house-boats—swash-bucklers in white flannels—discussing these articles, and speculating who could have written them. " As for the real author, no one ever suspected him; even on such a little island Mr. Anon failed to impress. As for knowing a pretty girl when he saw one nobody conceived it of the object in the corner. It was equally inconceivable to the ladies of the island." That this was bitter to him there is no doubt, for elsewhere he confesses that Anon's deepest ambition, deeper than his Rothschildian dream of earning a pound a day, deeper even than his desire to reach some little niche in literature, is a longing to be a favourite of the ladies. " If they would dislike him or fear him it would be something, but it is crushing to be just harmless." And so

[1] " Sandy " Riach makes another, less dignified, appearance in the last chapter of the book, where Barrie entrusts the circulation of the news of Rob's marriage round Thrums to " Sandersy Riach, *telegraph boy* ".

he pictures himself wandering forlornly on the island with no companion but the cow, looking on at the bright butterfly life about him but unable to take part in it. He is like a child at a confectioner's window; and if we are inclined to wonder if the picture is a true one, there is Mary Abinger to prove it, a figure as sweet and as unreal as any on the lids of the confectioner's boxes. She is a boy's dream of womanhood, not a woman. She is, in fact, the little water-cress seller, gone up in the world and with the thinnest imaginable veneer of sophistication. And the men in the book, who in themselves are real enough, are touched with Mary's unreality whenever they come near her or speak of her.

When a Man's Single was published in book form in October, 1888, and was followed two months later by *An Edinburgh Eleven*. This was a slim volume, also reprinted from *The British Weekly*, embodying a series of character-sketches of notable people to do with Edinburgh, and more particularly its University, which Barrie had contributed from time to time. Naturally, this book's appeal was chiefly local; but so lively were the portraits and so quick the humour that informed them that they can still give pleasure to readers who have never heard of most of the originals. Three books in a year sounds prodigious; but a journalist as industrious as Barrie, once he finds a publisher, can very soon see his name repeating itself on title-pages. Only seven months more went by before he saw it again, this time on the book which was to carry him to real success, *A Window in Thrums*.

This book is hardly less casual in construction than *Auld Licht Idylls*, to which it is a companion-piece. Once again the dominie of Glen Quharity is the nar-

THE "WINDOW IN THRUMS"

rator, and once again he is used to string together a series of chapters many of which have already been printed as separate articles. There is no connected story in the earlier part of the book; and when the last five chapters begin to knit themselves together to that close which Barrie's publishers found unbearably sad, but which moved both Stevenson and Robertson Nicoll to the deepest admiration, it becomes clear that the book can have been planned beforehand hardly at all, but was left to take shape as it went along. But that matters nothing. Here at last is Barrie writing at full power. He is treating of what he knows, and his fear of letting himself go has left him. He is in control of himself, and knows it, and can search his heart in confidence. Also, most important of all, his mother has at last become his heroine. Jess McQumpha, the lame woman of the Window, gets her outward characteristics from the Barries' neighbour, Bell Lunan. In herself, however, she is drawn direct from Margaret Ogilvy; and her daughter Leeby is drawn from Margaret's daughter Jane Ann. Here at last are women who are human beings, not simply projections of a youthful ideal. Jess is allowed faults which would have blotted a Mary Abinger out of existence; but because she is a real woman and a fine one, her faults show only as the natural complement of her qualities. They increase our understanding of her without losing our sympathy. For instance, in the chapter called *A Tale of a Glove*, Jess's possessive maternity drives her to a petty exhibition of jealousy such as no moralist could approve. No little seller of water-cress could behave so, and survive; but Stevenson's comment is, "A great page . . . and as true as death and judgment."

Barrie's practice as a journalist was always to get his subjects from his own life or that of those about him. Consequently, once his connexion with *The British Weekly* enabled him to write regularly on Scottish subjects, the years of compulsory exile in London were ended. His pen could be busy wherever he was, and from the time of his emancipation he divided his life between London and Kirriemuir. Strathview was now the property of Dr. Ogilvy, who had bought it to retire to when the time came, and the whole house (instead of the upper part they had first occupied) was rented from him by the Barries, so that there was room for the author both to live and to work there. At what precise date he was able to make the place his home again is not certain. The implication in *Margaret Ogilvy* is that he could be with his mother again for half the year even before *Auld Licht Idylls* became a book. At any rate, we can safely assume that most, if not all, of *A Window in Thrums* was written in Scotland. One absolutely precise date can be given. Barrie's growing importance, and his established success, made it possible for Greenwood to propose him, some time in 1889, for membership of the Garrick Club. One of the most delightful chapters in *Margaret Ogilvy* describes her inability to take this great event with proper seriousness, or to think of it as anything but a low scheme whereby a set of barefaced scoundrels (the committee) proposed to cheat her foolish son out of large sums of his hard-earned money. The date of Barrie's election to the club was January, 1890, George Meredith being one of his strongest backers; and the obvious deduction is that he had been spending a good deal of time in Kirriemuir before this.

A side-light on his movements at this time is thrown by his contributions to *Time*, a monthly magazine edited by Walter Sichel. In May, 1888, Sichel published a story of Barrie's called *My Neighbour*, in which the erratic Richard Abinger of *When a Man's Single* appeared again, now married but far from settled down. This was followed in the Christmas number by a wild burlesque in the manner of *Better Dead*; and then, with the new year, came a series of articles of quite extraordinary interest. These appeared monthly throughout 1889 under the title " What the Pit Says ". They were in the nature of dramatic criticism, but the author obviously had a free hand whether he dealt with plays, players or his neighbours in the audience, and whether he went to a first night or dropped in on a play casually during its run.

These articles, which have too long lain buried and forgotten, were written rather as entertainment than as serious criticism, and very entertaining they are; but their particular importance is that they illustrate better than any other of Barrie's writings how well he knew and understood the theatre before ever he came to write for it. His opinions on the plays he saw are firm and downright, and invariably have a basis in sound sense. In fact, he has that air of authority without dogmatism which no man can achieve unless he knows what he is talking about. For example, here is a sentence which few people would have had the vision to write in 1889 about one of the spectacular productions of Shakespeare then fashionable: " I do not know that elaborate stage furniture has not taken the poetry out of Shakespearian comedy, which mocks at realism."

The evidence given by these articles as to Barrie's

way of life is simply that the first seven are written about London productions; while of the last five one certainly and two more in all probability deal with performances seen in Scotland. The December article, which brings the series as well as the year to a close, is an account of Mrs. Langtry on tour with a production of *As You Like It* which she did not bring to the St. James's until February, 1890. This, and a general article on the music-hall which precedes it, could have been written at Strathview as easily as in London.

The year 1889, then, marks the end of Barrie's journalism. He evidently felt this himself, for in *The Greenwood Hat* he gives four years as the duration of the career of that " spare and diligent crumb ", James Anon. He had now a name. He had a club. He had a banking account, and he no longer put on formal garb in order to visit editors. In short, he could afford to be an author; and the publication in the spring of 1890 of his last book of collected articles, *My Lady Nicotine*, signalized the end of one phase just as the appearance in October, 1891, of *The Little Minister*, the first novel that Barrie had ever been able to plan and carry out at leisure, celebrated the beginning of another.

The autobiographical stuff in *My Lady Nicotine* is purely incidental. Indeed, the most interesting thing about this book from our point of view is the odd light that it sheds on its author's literary method. The papers that make it up are not in any way related to one another, but they are given a sort of unity because they are supposed to be written by a seasoned smoker, and they refer largely to the devotion of himself and his friends to a certain brand of tobacco. Seven years later an enterprising firm of tobacco merchants, finding

Elliott & Fry, Ltd.

J. M. Barrie in 1891

that their particular blend had been supplied to Barrie, got him to write a testimonial identifying it with the "Arcadia Mixture" of the book, and this advertisement greatly helped them in piling up an enormous fortune. The ironical point about the story, however, is that Barrie, when he wrote the articles, hardly smoked at all. He was doing what he so often did in his journalistic writings, assuming a character. Later on, perhaps by auto-suggestion, perhaps by sheer pressure of public opinion, he became the heavy smoker that he had pretended to be.

This trick of assuming a character is worth examining, for although Barrie said that his pen was clogged when he wrote in his own person, the truth is not quite so simple as that. It depended whether he was writing as a journalist or an artist. As journalist, when—as I have already suggested—he had to make almost a conscious effort to keep the strongest thing in his nature at bay, he must have found it very helpful to assume the character of an Indian bridge-builder, a dog, a young woman in love, or whatever it was. But when he wrote as an artist—that is, when he allowed his feelings to be engaged—he wrote straight out of his own heart, and it mattered nothing to him whether the feelings he described were presented as his own or as another's Better proof cannot be given of this than that the best piece of sustained prose-writing he was ever to achieve, *Margaret Ogilvy*, was written in the first person and with himself as a character only second in importance to its subject.

Meanwhile, in *The Little Minister*, he brought off a masterly compromise, for he drew the three chief characters in that happiest of romances one from each

of his three models. Gavin Dishart, the minister, is drawn from Barrie himself, not merely in his thoughts but in his appearance. He has Barrie's own sensitiveness about his lack of inches, here turned to much better literary use than when it had appeared disguised as Rob Angus's gigantic size and strength. Margaret Dishart, the minister's mother, is avowedly Margaret Ogilvy. And Babbie, the enchanting gipsy heroine, is the little seller of water-cress grown at last to the fullest stature of which she is capable. She is more real than Mary Abinger, because more humour has gone to her conception, and more skill—also more leisure—to the elaboration of her portrait. But she is still not a human being, or anything much more than a boy's dream. Whether Barrie knew that is not clear; but it is not to be doubted that his artist's instinct felt it. When his publishers had suggested an alteration to the " unbearably sad " ending of *A Window in Thrums*, Barrie had refused even to consider it, and said that he would never again have had any respect for himself if he had consented to bring Jess's son back in time to see her before she died. No such blow to his self-respect was threatened when he brought *The Little Minister* to a happy ending far less probable than the one his publishers had suggested for *A Window in Thrums*. After all, Jess's son might have come home in time without straining probability at all; but that Babbie, with her gipsy blood and her aristocratic upbringing, should settle down happily in the Auld Licht Manse in Thrums, to bear the Little Minister's children and keep house for him on less than a hundred a year, is an idea not to be entertained outside a fairy-tale.

Chapter VI

APPROACH TO THE THEATRE

BARRIE was never the kind of man to whom the life of a club could appeal. In later years he belonged to many, but entered them seldom, and in his writings he professed not to know what went on inside them. But in the first pride of his election to the Garrick—and perhaps in apprehension of what his mother might say if he allowed the subscription she so heartily begrudged to run to waste—he conquered his shyness. This shaped his future career. He made friends with Irving; and Irving told him he must write for the theatre—drove him (so Barrie says) to write his first three plays, and found him managers for them. Barrie was not unwilling. As we have seen, he had always been fascinated by the theatre.

It was not Irving, however, who " drove " him to his first attempt on the professional stage but H. B. Marriott Watson, a colleague of Barrie's on the *St. James's,* who figures as " Marriott " in *My Lady Nicotine.* Marriott Watson was one of W. E. Henley's young men, a promising novelist, and he had an idea for a play about Richard Savage, the eighteenth-century poet. He suggested that Barrie should collaborate with him in this, and Barrie consented. Henley, who had his eye on Barrie as a coming man, wrote a prologue to the piece, which was given a trial matinée (at the

authors' expense) at the Criterion Theatre on 16th April, 1891. The company was quite a strong one, the name-part being played by Bernard Gould, who later abandoned a promising stage career, turned cartoonist, and achieved fame as Bernard Partridge of *Punch*; and Cyril Maude had a smaller part. The story, however, was neither historically accurate nor theatrically plausible, and the play fell flat. The best that criticism could find to say of it was that it showed some promise of better work to be expected from its authors in the future. The stubbornly cheerful article which Barrie wrote after this failure is in *The Greenwood Hat*, and in it he suggests that perhaps the play had done some good after all, if only by inducing the Ibsenite and the anti-Ibsenite critics to agree about something.

This reference to the controversy then raging in intellectual London may easily have been the germ of the idea which was to start Barrie off, six weeks later, on his real career as a dramatist. At any rate the gay one-act burlesque, *Ibsen's Ghost*, which was produced by J. L. Toole at his own theatre on 30th May of the same year, must have been dashed off quickly since Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, which it parodies, was not produced at the Vaudeville till 20th April. It is in fact no more than a brilliant journalistic comment on the Ibsen cult of the time, put into dialogue form. Barrie showed it to Irving, who took it to his great friend Toole and insisted that he must produce it. Toole knew nothing whatever of Ibsen and little more of Barrie, but he took Irving's word for it and put the play on.

Barrie never published *Ibsen's Ghost*. The "prompt" copy got lost, and no other was available. Forty years later, however, having a curiosity to see what his first

play had been like and how he had dared to make game of the dramatist he had always known to be the greatest of his age, he applied to the Lord Chamberlain on the chance that the licensed copy was still lying in his office; and it was. Having scraped the text clean of Toole's "improvements", Barrie had copies made privately for half a dozen friends, with a preface consisting of a lively and very characteristic account of its production. He says there—and Irene Vanbrugh, who had her first original part in this play as a girl of nineteen, confirms —that Toole never from first to last had any idea what the play meant. Toole himself, in a remarkable make-up, played Ibsen. He "wandered through the thing", says Barrie, "searching vainly for what it might be about, which, cunning one that he was, proved to be the best way of playing it". The play had the same effect as *Richard Savage*—though for a happier reason—of uniting the critics, for its satire, though pointed, was not barbed. For so short a play it created a remarkable stir, and Barrie relates in his preface to *Peter Pan* that at the first performance a man in the pit found it so funny that he went into hysterics and had to be removed. Irene Vanbrugh made a personal success with extraordinarily close parodies of both Marion Lea and Elizabeth Robins, who were then acting Thea and Hedda in the Ibsen play at the Vaudeville. And Tesman was played by George Shelton, afterwards famous as Smee in *Peter Pan*.

And so, modestly and humbly, Barrie entered the theatre. All through the rehearsals of *Ibsen's Ghost* he sat quiet, and let Toole do with the play almost whatever he liked. Partly this was because he had fallen under the spell of the man who had been his favourite

comedian when he was at school, and whom he now found " a figure so lovable that, had he not already been, Dickens would have invented him ". Partly it was because he was moving as a stranger in a new world whose ways were different from those of the world outside, and must be learned.

That he learned them with characteristic thoroughness, the rest of his working life was to prove. Opinions differ very widely on Barrie's stature as an artist, but nobody who knows the theatre has ever attempted to deny his quality as a craftsman. His stage technique, within its own limits, is practically flawless—and because of the theatre's mechanical difficulties, technique matters relatively far more in play-writing than in any other form of literary composition—yet it was his habit later on in life to deny that he had any stage technique at all. In a preface to a collected edition of Harold Chapin's plays, for instance, he declares that in order to know what to say he has had to buy a book about how to write plays, and has retired abashed before the author's knowledge and the difficulty of the subject. And in *The Greenwood Hat* he picks up this point again, and adds " I never knew (and I don't know now) how plays are written, nor gave stage-craft any conscious thought ". Since from this point onwards we are to watch how Barrie's work shifted more and more away from the study and on to the stage, it is important to decide at once just how far we can believe in his picture of himself as a man who, in the theatre, went right not deliberately but by instinct or accident.

To an extent, I am sure the picture is a true one. The faculty which makes the dramatist, without which no man on earth can ever become a dramatist, is an

ability to make division of himself while he is writing —to become two people, one an author who is putting a play down on paper, the other a detached observer sitting at an imaginary performance of the play upon an imaginary stage. A novelist needs no such faculty; he can be at the same moment writer and reader in his own undivided person. But unless a dramatist, while writing, can clearly see and hear how the events he is imagining will look and sound, *and how an audience will react to them*, when they are produced on the stage, he is wasting time and effort. Because they have lacked this faculty, many accomplished novelists have seen their plays fail on the stage—Henry James, George Moore, Joseph Conrad and others equally famous; and indeed, about the time when Barrie began to try his hand in the theatre, it had come to be an accepted canon of criticism that no novelist could write a play. Now, to Barrie, this ability to split his personality was natural. He used it not merely in writing plays but in ordinary life. He himself said so plainly in his rectorial address at St. Andrews in 1922, when he told his audience about his second self, " M'Connachie ". With the wayward M'Connachie to hold the pen and the practical Barrie to watch the performance, it is perhaps not very surprising that the plays came right, or that the dramatist did not recognize his method as " stage technique ". Yet in the very act of disclaiming the possession of technique, he shows that he was always aware of the necessity for the writer of plays to be his own audience. " My own plan," he says, " was simply to make everything clear to myself in the hope that this would clear a way for the spectator."

But if we admit that Barrie's clear vision and sure-

footedness in the theatre were partly the unconscious gift of temperament, he is not to be believed when he implies that he had never given any thought to the problems of theatrical craftsmanship. The criticisms he wrote for *Time* were full of constructive ideas, and many of the other articles he wrote during his years as a free-lance journalist had the stage for subject. One in particular, contributed in 1889 to *The Scots Observer*, showed that he had thought hard enough to be able to rise superior to the prejudices of the time. The article was called "The Coming Dramatist", and its concluding paragraph deserves quotation in full:

One would think that there are novelists with us who could write plays that would be literary as well as effective. Some of them have tried and failed, but obviously because they did not set about it in the proper way. Plays and novels require quite different construction; but the story-writer who is dramatic could become sufficiently theatrical by serving a short apprenticeship to the stage. There are such prizes to pluck for those that can stand on tiptoe, that the absence of an outstanding dramatist is as surprising as it is disappointing.

These are not the words of a man who does not know how plays are written. The tone is much more like that of a general surveying a stretch of country over which he hopes to have a chance to make a successful attack, although his predecessors have failed. So far as we know Barrie did not meditate such an attack at the time when this article was published; but it is plain that if the campaign was ever to take place, its strategy was already determined. And it is interesting to notice that when the time came everything went exactly according to plan.

With Irving to urge him on, Barrie now set himself to write a full-length play for Toole. He was not unwilling, but he has confessed that he did at first tread this new walk of literature rather contemptuously—as did most writers of eminence at that time. He did not trouble to think out a new idea for his play, but went back to *When a Man's Single* and found what he wanted there. He took the chapters of the book which tell how the impressive baronet whom Mary Abinger's father has been entertaining in his country house turns out to be a barber masquerading as a gentleman, and of them he made his story. The " untheatrical " novelist, having got so far, would probably have gone on to transfer the characters of his book to the stage. Barrie, knowing that " plays and novels require quite different construction ", took the bolder, more original and infinitely more sensible course of beginning again from the beginning. He took the Tagg's Island houseboat, which had already done him such good service, and made it his setting. He invented an entirely new set of characters. And the result was a farcical comedy called *Walker, London*, which to the casual eye had almost no relation at all to the novel from which it came.

It was produced at Toole's Theatre on 25th February, 1892. Toole played Jasper Phipps, the barber with social aspirations, and the part suited him exactly. Irene Vanbrugh had the part of an erudite young woman from Girton—an elaboration from a character who makes a brief appearance in the description of a students' party in *An Edinburgh Eleven*—and George Shelton was once more in the company. Seymour Hicks, another actor whose career was to be much bound up with Barrie's,

played a lively young medical student, having got the part by telling Toole that Barrie thought him just the man for it, and Barrie that Toole did. The most difficult part to cast was the heroine—who had to combine youth, beauty and charm with an ability to flirt. Jerome K. Jerome, consulted on the point, recommended Mary Ansell, a young girl who had done well on tour in a play of his own, had made a success at a special matinée, and was now playing with Charles Wyndham at the Criterion. Barrie met Miss Ansell and conceived a great admiration for her; and whenever Toole, who notoriously hated spending money on his productions and was already appalled at the prospective cost of the practicable house-boat, suggested other less expensive actresses, Barrie simply said: "Mary Ansell gets the par-rt." And so in the end it was. She not only got the part, but played it (according to Clement Scott) "with infinite spirit and refinement", and before long it was clear, to the ladies of the company at all events, that the author was in love with his *ingenue*.

The play was a great success, running for 511 performances. It moved Clement Scott to hail Barrie as a new Robertson, and Scott was an infallible judge of what was effective in the theatre. For all that, it can only rank as a good piece of journeyman's work. Nobody has ever taken the risk of trying to revive it, and Barrie would have prevented its publication if he could.[1] Yet its value to him was great, for it enabled him to serve more than an apprenticeship to the stage. *Ibsen's Ghost* had taught him much, and when *Walker, London* went into rehearsal he was no longer content to let

[1] Barrie sold the play to Toole outright, and therefore lost control of it. It has been published in an "acting edition" only.

Toole have a free hand. As in the question of Mary Ansell's engagement, so in other matters he now knew clearly what he wanted, and in his own quiet way he saw that he got it.

With a play running steadily, and a novel going through edition after edition—not to mention that his earlier books were still selling—Barrie could now have afforded to stop and look about him. First, however, he settled down to write, no doubt at Irving's invitation, a play with a part for Irving himself. This was *The Professor's Love Story*. It was completed by September, and though Irving, when he read the play, did not like the part for himself, he is said to have suggested that it might suit John Hare. Hare—if the story told by Alexander Woollcott, the American critic, is true—tried to read the play but was defeated and enraged by Barrie's illegible handwriting. Thereupon Barrie wrote out a fairer copy and sent it to E. S. Willard, who accepted it. If Barrie did this, he must have been very quick about it, for Willard, who had returned from America in June, 1892, and went back there some time in September, certainly did accept the play [1] and take it back with him, producing it in New York just before Christmas.

Barrie was therefore by no means idle, even though London saw no new work of his for more than a year after the production of *Walker, London*. But compared with the ferocious labour of his years as a free-lance journalist, his life was that of a gentleman of leisure. He was by this time very much at home in his exciting new world, he knew all literary London, and found it

[1] It is said that Willard bought the play outright for £50, and that Barrie bought it back later.

at times both easy and pleasant to come out of his shell. His life-long interest in cricket, for instance, had led him to form a private team. He and his two close friends, Gilmour and Marriott Watson, out one day for a walk at Shere, stopped to watch the village team perform; and Barrie, encouraged by the elderly appearance of the players, decided to challenge them. The fixture was made, and a distinguished eleven was collected which included, among others, Bernard Partridge and two African explorers—explorers always had a fascination for Barrie. On the way down in the train the question of a name for the club was discussed, and Barrie, who had by this time discovered that however impressive his eleven might be in the great world, it was not likely to shine on the cricket-field, asked one of the explorers the African for "Heaven help us". The answer was "Allahakbar", so the club became the Allahakbars till they changed their title, in their captain's honour, to the Allahakbarries. In this inaugural match they made eleven runs, and were overwhelmed.[1]

By now, the days when James Anon had had to fall

[1] In later years, the Allahakbarries became a famous institution, with several matches annually against villages and at country houses, and a special occasion each summer when they played Broadway in Worcestershire, where Mary Anderson was the presiding genius. She understood nothing of the game, but was always fiercely partisan and, Barrie alleges, had a "powerful way" of taking the Allahakbarries' top scorer for a walk round the field and persuading him to play for her side in the second innings. Barrie himself was not much of a cricketer, and seldom made any runs to speak of. He knew the game thoroughly, however, and was not negligible as a bowler. Conan Doyle, perhaps the best cricketer who ever played for the Allahakbarries until they made a glorious last appearance at Kirriemuir in 1930 with Macartney and Mailey, of the Australian team, in their number, says of him:

Barrie was no novice. He bowled an insidious left-hand good-length ball coming from leg which was always likely to get a wicket.

back on the Tagg's Island cow for feminine society were very far behind. Barrie was a celebrity, and could never again have private anguish because women thought him of no account. He did not cease, no doubt, to suffer pangs at the suspicion that their interest was for the author rather than the man, for the belief that they considered him "harmless" was to continue to rankle all his life. But he was no longer abashed by them, nor apt to treat them as beings of a different and mysterious order. He was, for instance, on terms of delightfully easy friendship with Irene Vanbrugh and her three sisters, in spite of the fact that two of the four were leading London actresses—creatures such as would surely have sent the diffident Anon scudding to his cow for protection. More than that, he was by now the declared suitor of another leading London actress, and though he had not yet persuaded Mary Ansell to be engaged to him, he had hopes that she would consent.

Towards the end of 1892 his health, which had hitherto been excellent, began to trouble him. There is a reference to this in a letter from Stevenson, written in December, trying to persuade him to go out to Vailima. (The two men were friends now, though they had never met and were destined never to meet.) But early in 1893 he was well enough to undertake a very curious commission. The rift between Gilbert and Sullivan which had appeared during the run of *The Gondoliers*—that is, some time in 1890 or at the beginning of 1891—was still in existence. Their next joint work, *Utopia, Limited* (produced in October, 1893), was consequently not yet even contemplated, and D'Oyly Carte, in great difficulty with the task of keeping the policy of the Savoy Theatre going until the two touchy collaborators should consent to be

reconciled, asked Barrie to write him a libretto. Why Carte hit on Barrie is not clear, unless we assume that this is the third of the plays for which Irving found Barrie a manager. That Barrie should have agreed to try his hand is not so surprising. Ever since he had begun writing as a small boy, he had had a fondness for dropping into verse, and a certain blindness to the fact that his verse was not very good. This blindness now allowed him to try quite gaily to fill Gilbert's shoes, though he had not Gilbert's sense of rhythm, his mastery of rhyme, his ability to make verse move as freely as prose, nor even his knowledge that the lyrics of a comic opera should advance the play's action, not hold it up. Barrie constructed *Jane Annie, or The Good Conduct Prize* —named, it need hardly be said, after his sister— in the traditional two acts, and had written the first act and planned the second, when his health again failed. In order to get the opera finished he called in Conan Doyle—already famous as the creator of Sherlock Holmes, and one of the stalwarts of the Allahakbarries, but not a happy choice as a lyric-writer. Doyle promised to help, but when he examined the work, as he says himself, his heart sank. He could not conceive what had made Barrie accept the commission, and he completed the " book " purely from friendship, and with no hope of success. *Jane Annie* came to the Savoy on 13th May, 1893, and left it again only a few days later. The critics found little to praise but one of the settings, which was a golf green in the grounds of a girls' school. One of them complained that writing *about* schoolgirls had made the authors write *for* schoolgirls.

Another failure, though not an important one, followed this. On 3rd June, a one-act adaptation from

Vanity Fair, called *Becky Sharp*, was produced at Terry's Theatre as part of a quintuple bill. Barrie was said to have reproduced Thackeray's words without capturing his spirit. The experience was useful to him if it taught him that this kind of stage adaptation from other men's books is seldom worth a good dramatist's while; and he certainly never attempted anything of the sort again.

The breakdown in his health which had interfered with the writing of *Jane Annie* proved to be the forerunner of a series of bouts of illness. Mary Ansell left the cast of *Walker, London* before the end of the play's run, and went North to help nurse him through one of these. He was well enough in the winter to take the chair at a Burns dinner at Greenock, for a lively description of the occasion was published by Henley in *The Scots Observer*. This anonymous article made fun of Barrie's appearance, his manners and his oratory, and it caused great offence among his admirers, who rushed to his defence. Henley was delighted (for the article was in fact Barrie's own), and even when it was insinuated that he had written it himself for mean and unworthy motives, would not let the joke be "given away". Not long afterwards, however, Barrie fell ill again, this time much more seriously. Mary Ansell, to whom by this time he was engaged, nursed him through a sharp attack of pneumonia. And on 9th July, 1894, when he was convalescent but not yet strong enough to face a church ceremony, they were married privately at Strathview.

Meanwhile, Willard had at last returned from America and had given *The Professor's Love Story* its first London performance at the Comedy Theatre on 25th June; and the news that his play was settling down to a successful

run must have seemed to the author a very timely and appropriate wedding present. It was not such a good piece of craftsmanship as *Walker, London*, for its story had a fundamental flaw—the idea that an absent-minded man of science could fall in love with his pretty secretary and, on being told what was the matter with him, could first ask: "But who is the woman?" and then take flight to Scotland to escape the unknown siren, *taking the secretary with him.* Crude incredibility of this kind is no doubt what Barrie has in mind when he confesses that he did not at first treat the theatre with proper respect; and the final judgment on the play's quality is that the author did not publish it. Still, Willard's acting as Professor Goodwillie and some excellent incidental comic writing carried the play on for a run of 144 performances; and it has been several times revived.

Chapter VII

MARGARET OGILVY

THE romance that hangs about islands had always had a special appeal to Barrie. Islands were always cropping up in the stories he wove and the games he played as a boy, and when he was a man they still held him under their spell. There is an island in *The Admirable Crichton*, one in *Peter Pan*, and one in *Mary Rose*. And so, when repeated invitations came from Robert Louis Stevenson that Barrie should visit him in his home in the South Seas, he had always promised himself that some day he would set out on the long journey and meet the man whose works he admired and whose friendship he valued so much. Now that success was assured, he could command both time and money for the journey. But one thing still held him back. Margaret Ogilvy was now an old woman, and it was her fear, unspoken yet not hidden from the son who knew her so well, that if he went far away she might die without seeing him again. While she lived, therefore, he could not go; and in the outcome he never went at all, for on 3rd December, 1894, Stevenson himself died suddenly and unexpectedly. Yet, by the irony of fate, Barrie might almost as well have gone to the South Seas after all, for when Margaret Ogilvy did come to die soon after, he was too far away to reach her.

He was making one of his rare trips abroad, having

gone with his wife to Switzerland to shake off the last effects of his illness. A fortnight had gone by, and he had just had a reassuring letter about his mother's health from his sister Jane Ann, when a telegram arrived to say that she, Jane Ann, was dead. He started for home at once, but it was three days' journey. In London he learnt that his mother still did not know of her favourite daughter's death, and that the family was waiting for him to tell her. But he was too late by twelve hours to see her alive. She died on 3rd September, 1895, within three days of her seventy-sixth birthday; and Jane Ann, who was forty-eight, on 31st August. Barrie had for long been preparing himself for his mother's death, but Jane Ann's was a dreadful shock. She was the most reserved of all that reserved family, and her devotion to her mother was so absolute that no member of the household even suspected that she was gravely and incurably ill, if indeed she knew it herself. But by dying so, she solved a problem that otherwise might have proved insoluble—whether she could have made any kind of a life for herself now that her mother was dead. After his first grief was over, Barrie saw this, and was thankful that she had been spared " the long littleness " of such living.

We have seen already how deep was the influence that Margaret Ogilvy had over her son; it is time now to try to estimate its value. Consciously as his mother, unconsciously as his source of inspiration, she moulded his life and his work. From the time he was a small boy he idealized and all but worshipped her. She was the centre of his universe, it was to her that his work was dedicated, at her feet that he laid his early successes. And he served her so faithfully that when she died he

MARGARET OGILVY

A photograph of Barrie's mother taken at Glasgow about 1871

was able to say, simply and unhesitatingly, that he looked back through the years and could not see the smallest thing left undone that he could have done for her since he was a boy. Such devotion as this, which in speaking of his sister he calls the fierce joy of loving too much, can be a destructive as well as a creative force. It takes a strong personality to inspire such feeling, and needs a strong character to keep it under control. Because Margaret Ogilvy was a woman of fine temper who used her power wisely, her son's devotion to her and his devotion to his art were never in opposition. He was able to turn the two streams into the same channel, and they flowed with double strength. Yet because, with all her qualities, she was a limited woman, some of her limitations had the profoundest effect upon Barrie both as a writer and as a man.

For example, she had been compelled by her mother's death to be a housekeeper to her father and a mother to her little brother from the age of eight. She undertook the task with a gay gallantry that was always characteristic of her, but except for occasional outbreaks, she had to say good-bye to her childhood, and she had to snatch her playtime, as she snatched her scanty education, in the intervals between household tasks. The tales of how she had had to grow up so much too soon worked powerfully on her small son's imagination, and he tells how it was the horror of his boyhood that he too must some day give up the games. Something of this horror remained with him all his life; and if it gave him, as an artist, the inspiration for *Peter Pan*, it deprived him, as a man, of the ability or the desire to look squarely at life.

For another example, perhaps more important still,

Margaret Ogilvy handed on to her son her feelings about sex-relationships. She was married to David Barrie for more than half a century. She bore him ten children, and she was at all times a dutiful and faithful wife to him. Yet it is overwhelmingly clear to anybody who reads her story that all her deepest feelings were for her children. Her husband hardly comes into the tale at all. He is mentioned casually here and there, and once there is a direct reference to him as " a most loving as he was always a well-loved husband ", a man Barrie is very proud to be able to call his father. But the passage reads like a testimonial, and is obviously one of respect rather than of warm affection. Father and daughter, mother and son—these are the relationships between the sexes which meant most to Margaret Ogilvy. The one hero of her life was her own father. The one undying sorrow of her life was for her dead boy. One feels that if David Barrie the elder had died in his son's stead she would have mourned him sincerely, but that time would have healed that hurt before very long. She was fond of reading books of exploration, and when she read in her newspaper of the triumphant return of the leader of some expedition, her comment would be that his mother must be a proud woman. That the explorer might have a wife never occurred to her, or was an irrelevance.

As with the mother, so with the son. In all Barrie's writings there is hardly to be remembered a scene between husband and wife that goes beneath the surface, while the many scenes between mothers and sons and the exquisitely written father and daughter scene in *Dear Brutus* are all deeply and truly felt. John Shand in *What Every Woman Knows* never ceases to stray

from Maggie Wylie's side until she makes it clear that she is more mother to him than wife. Grizel with Sentimental Tommy has the same attitude. She wants Tommy to be a husband to her, but only so that she can be a mother to him. And when Mary Rose returns from her other world, she has hardly more than a puzzled regret when she finds her young husband grown middle-aged and grey. All her thoughts are for her baby son; when she finds that he too is lost to her, she dies and becomes a ghost and haunts the house till he comes back. All these characters act as they do because of Barrie's knowledge that his mother would have acted so in the same situations. When he has her for his model he is certain of himself and her. Outside that intense but narrow experience he cannot attempt the profundities, for he has no other model that he can draw " in the round ".

Still it is not given to many artists to know even one sitter as he knew his. Critics have referred to Barrie's life of his mother as an " idealized " biography, and in the sense that it is a labour of love and not a detached study the book can be so described. But if the suggestion is that he touched up the portrait, turning an ordinary human being into an impossible angel, then it must be denied at once. His feeling for his mother was true and genuine; he loved her for her faults as much as for her virtues. Therefore he had no need to pretend. He drew her, faults and limitations and all, knowing that when he had shown her to others as he saw her himself, the faults and limitations would not be the least of her attractions. She had her vanities, her snobberies, her obstinacies; she could be, on occasion, a very tiresome old lady indeed. She was a possessive mother, who

accepted her daughter's life-long devotion and her son's adoration without a qualm. True, she never took them for granted; she was too perceptive for that. But she never reflected that by dominating the lives of these two of her children she was compelling them to look backwards instead of forwards. Also, if the episode of the glove in *A Window in Thrums* has as much basis in real life as the rest of the book, she could be blindly jealous.

Yet such faults only serve to set off her virtues. With them all, she was a fine character and a great personality. Kirriemuir did not recognize this—Hammerton quotes remarks by her neighbours which show that they could see no special reason why she should have a book written about her—but then Kirriemuir is a town which wants to be loved for itself alone, and has always been puzzled by Barrie's fame and resentful of the public's interest in "Thrums". It is true enough that Margaret Ogilvy's special quality might never have been recognized outside her own home if her son had not become a great writer, but that is equally true of many remarkable women whose names are honoured in history as the chief influence in the making of men of genius. Conan Doyle, meeting her in 1893, when she was near the end of her life, was instantly impressed. And indeed, the mixture of courage, humour, tenderness and intelligence that was hers, together with her power of concentration, would have made her a person of mark in any walk of life.

Just before her last illness Barrie finished *Sentimental Tommy*, in which Grizel, the most real and most lovable of all his heroines, appears as the little girl in a magenta frock and a pinafore that his mother used to be. He never read her any of that book; by the time it was

finished she was no longer capable of the effort to follow a story. To him this was, he says in *Margaret Ogilvy*, as if his book must go out cold into the world, but I wonder whether perhaps it was not as well that she could not take it in. Robertson Nicoll refused to have it said that the figure of Sentimental Tommy was drawn from Barrie himself, but his attitude cannot be justified now. The confessions which Barrie makes in *The Greenwood Hat* concerning himself agree too exactly with his description of Tommy Sandys to allow much doubt that Tommy is a projection of those traits in his own character which he most feared and disliked. For example, one of Tommy's most outrageous exploits in sentimentality was to change his own clothes for another boy's " mourning blacks ", and to sit sorrowing for some dead stranger while the owner of the clothes took a short holiday from grief; and on the opening page of *The Greenwood Hat* Barrie tells this story of himself. Tommy, in fact, plays Hyde to Barrie's Jekyll, and I feel that the mother who knew him so well would have seen this and have been hurt by the bitterness of some of the self-criticism.

Sentimental Tommy was not published till a year later, no doubt because from January, 1896, till November of that year *Scribner's Magazine* was running it as a serial in America. By the time it appeared in book form Barrie had written *Margaret Ogilvy*; both books were published that autumn. The novel was welcomed by that large body of opinion which was looking to Barrie as one of the chief hopes of English letters, and distrusted profoundly his adventures in the theatre. This new book was by no means a perfect novel, but it represented a growth in power and grasp, and was taken as a promise that the author had no intention of letting

the stage interfere with his best work. *Margaret Ogilvy*, on the other hand, had a very mixed reception. For some, it was incomparably the finest thing he had yet done; to say that it was a literary masterpiece was only to state the least of its qualities—it was the most beautiful tribute ever paid by a son to the memory of his dead mother. For others, in Scotland particularly, it was simply a violation of privacy. J. H. Millar, then a critic of standing in Scotland, described the book as "an exercise compared with which the labours of the resurrectionist are praiseworthy, and which many men (I believe) had rather lose their right hand than set themselves to attempt". To those who think, as I do, that *Margaret Ogilvy* is a book such as a man might well give his right hand to achieve, a book that deserves to live and do honour to its subject and its writer when most of the writings of our time are forgotten, it seems incredible that such a judgment can seriously have been pronounced. Yet there are still people who share Millar's prejudice, and even outdo his violence. Only recently, an applicant for some information or other concerning Barrie was met with a blank refusal of help from the official to whom he had written, on the ground that even Barnum, the showman, had never sunk so low as to exhibit his mother's bones with tears to the populace. Such a view is sentimentality run mad. There is no logic in it, nor any sense of proportion. If Barrie had been a painter, and his portrait of his mother had been done in oils instead of ink, this kind of detractor would never have raised a whisper.

Meanwhile, after his two books had gone to press and before they were published, Barrie set off with Robertson Nicoll for New York. He had now a following in America

as enthusiastic as the one at home. There was business concerning copyrights to be done and the suggestion of a dramatization of *The Little Minister* to be looked into; and these inducements, together with the excitement of travelling so far from home for the first time in his life, were strong enough to make him face the fact that America required its lions to roar in public as frequently and as loudly as possible. Fortunately, perhaps, for Barrie's peace of mind, he found that he was not the chief lion of Scotland in America that season. "Ian Maclaren"—in ordinary life, the Reverend John Watson—was there on a triumphant lecture-tour. His book, *Beside the Bonnie Brier-Bush*, was the most popular of all the Kailyard School of fiction which had come into existence after the success of *A Window in Thrums*. It had swept the United States; and Watson, who was a man of great charm, with all the social graces that Barrie lacked, had made himself as popular as his book. While the full glare of the limelight fell on the lesser writer, Barrie's shrinking figure contrived to pass comparatively unnoticed in the shadows.

All the same, this American visit proved to be the turning-point of Barrie's career. The suggestion that *The Little Minister* might be turned into a play had come from Charles Frohman, soon to be the greatest theatre-manager of his time, who had in mind an actress for the part of the heroine—Maude Adams, at that time playing in *Rosemary*. Frohman and Barrie met, found that they were kindred spirits, and made friends; and so was formed the association which was to make Barrie a serious dramatist. He always insisted afterwards that just as he had been first urged into the theatre by Irving (and in a smaller degree by George Meredith), so he

was kept there, rather against his will, by Frohman. Even in his last book we still find him maintaining that novels were more his line. There are various accounts, which cannot now be reconciled with one another, of how Frohman persuaded Barrie to make the adaptation he wanted, and after it was made to strengthen the part of Babbie so that he could use it for his purpose of making Maude Adams a star. Setting aside picturesque but unreliable detail, we have two solid facts—that Barrie went to see *Rosemary* at Frohman's invitation on the night of his arrival in New York, and that the dramatic version of *The Little Minister* was given its first production at the Empire Theatre there on 27th September, 1897, under Frohman's management and with Maude Adams as Babbie. The London production followed little more than a month later, on 6th November at the Haymarket, but here no strengthening was needed for Babbie. She was charmingly played by Winifred Emery, but the star part, if there was one, belonged to Cyril Maude as the Little Minister himself.

In making this adaptation Barrie showed more clearly than before how well he understood that novels and plays need quite different treatment. When he took part of the plot of *When a Man's Single* to make *Walker, London*, there was no ostensible connexion between the two compositions, and consequently no temptation to try to transfer to the stage scenes that had been successful with novel-readers. In *The Little Minister* he was attempting that task in which so many have failed, of telling over again in one medium a story already familiar in another. To succeed in such an enterprise a man needs craftsmanship and the courage of his convictions. Barrie had both. He did not try to transfer his novel to the

stage—he began again from the beginning, telling the story in a new form and making drastic changes where theatrical effect made it advisable. He did not attempt, for instance, to explain the very complicated relationship between Lord Rintoul and Babbie the gipsy as it stands in the book; he knew that it would waste stage time to small dramatic purpose. He boldly simplified the story, changing his heroine's red gipsy blood to a more usual blue, making her Lady Babbie and Lord Rintoul's daughter, turning the little water-cress seller, in fact, into a princess in disguise. Literary critics have girded at this and other changes in the story, complaining that they debase *The Little Minister* as a play to a level far below that of the novel. There are two answers to these critics. One is that nobody but a very sanguine optimist expects an adaptation from one medium to another to be on the same artistic plane as the original. The other is that they do not know the theatre.

Chapter VIII

TOMMY AND GRIZEL

WE have seen that Barrie was a romantic about women. This is a condition of mind natural enough to a boy, but the man who does not outgrow it lays up for himself a store of trouble. He has little hope of making a success of marriage, because when he falls in love he loves not the real woman but his own imagined version of her. He commonly ignores the virtues and qualities that she has, and endows her with a new set that he would like her to have. If the woman is very much in love with him, or has a profound feeling for him of any kind—admiration for his work, for instance—she will unconsciously (or even consciously) mould herself to his ideas, and become outwardly the woman he wants her to be. So long as she is content with life on such terms, the marriage will seem an ideally happy one. But when her feeling for her husband, whatever it is, has lost its first heat, the wife wants, like all the unhappy heiresses in the stories, to be loved for herself alone. She needs a real relationship between man and woman, based on a thorough knowledge of one another's characters; and this is a thing which, except by a miracle, she will never get from a romanticist.

It would be mere impertinence on my part, writing so soon after Barrie's death and with the little infor-

mation that is available, to attempt to make any detailed statements about the course of Barrie's married life with Mary Ansell. But the main facts are known to all—that they lived together without disharmony for nearly fifteen years, and that Mrs. Barrie then fell very deeply in love with another man, a young novelist called Gilbert Cannan, and left her husband, who divorced her in 1909; and no outline of Barrie's character or estimate of his artistic quality can have value if it fails to take these events into account. I have myself no doubt at all that the Barries' marriage did follow some such course as that of the hypothetical case described above. My chief authority for this is Mary Ansell herself, who in her book, *Dogs and Men*, published in 1924, goes very near to saying so. She is writing of her love for animals, and the passage reads:

> Their candour, their surprising confidence, disarms me. . . . I, too, become helplessly myself. They never withhold themselves from me as men withhold themselves. When the dogs loved me, they did it without forethought or afterthought, because they couldn't help it. But men didn't love me unless they wanted to; unless I fitted in with their idea of me. The dogs didn't have an idea of me. They just loved me—me—me—with passion and warmth, without thinking about it.

She goes on to say that she has only known what it was to love clever men, whose reserves were impregnable; and that she loved her dogs because they could never be clever in that way. "They could never be complicated as the men were complicated."

That is clear enough, but if corroboration is wanted I go to Barrie himself for it. He has not spoken directly of his marriage in any of his autobiographical writings,

but in *Tommy and Grizel*, which appeared in 1900 and was the last and very much the finest and most mature of his Thrums books, there are many passages which I can only interpret as being intended to analyse and account for those very reserves and complications in himself to which Mary Ansell refers. In this book Tommy Sandys and Grizel are adults, but only she has "grown up". He is still Sentimental Tommy. The theme of the book is their love for one another; but while Grizel's love for Tommy is deep and true, the love of a woman for the man she hopes to marry (though, being drawn from Margaret Ogilvy, she will certainly "mother" him too much when she has got him), Tommy's love for Grizel is a boy's love, gusty and uncertain. The obstacle between them is Tommy's sister Elspeth, a sweet, backboneless creature whose dependence on her brother is absolute. But when Elspeth transfers her dependence from Tommy to the young Thrums doctor, and Grizel turns confidently to her lover for an answer to her own joy, that their time of waiting is over, she reads in his eyes only terror. He has been deceiving himself and her. He is afraid of marriage, afraid of reality, and—since she is an utterly real person—afraid of her.

All through this book the feeling strengthens that Tommy is Barrie's Mr. Hyde. The story heels gradually over towards tragedy—not Tommy's tragedy, for he is far below tragic stature, but Grizel's tragedy that the life of a woman so fine should be wrecked by her devotion to a man so unworthy. Tommy is by now a famous author—his great work, by a fine touch of irony, is all about women—but Grizel cares nothing at all for his fame or his book. Her one care is that he should grow

up, and become real. It is as though Barrie were saying to himself, as the figure of Tommy dwindles and dwindles to his miserable death: "This is what *you* might become if you failed to be honest with yourself—if you let sentimentality, that 'leering distorted thing',[1] get the mastery over you." At the end of the book he comes very near to open confession that Tommy is himself, when in his own person he addresses the reader: "Have you discovered that I was really pitying the boy who was so fond of games that he could not with years become a man, telling nothing that was not true, but doing it with unnecessary scorn in the hope that I might goad you into saying, 'Come, come, you are too hard on him.'"

One is tempted also to wonder whether Grizel's haunting fear of something evil in her nature, that might at any moment break out and thwart her passionate desire to be good, is perhaps another transmutation of Barrie's fear of his sentimental side. Obviously, however, we cannot hope here to disentangle autobiographical fact from artistic embroidery. All that we can say with any certainty is that in the character of Tommy autobiographical fact is a main ingredient, and that Barrie seems to have known clearly enough the complications of his own nature. Also, Tommy is not the only one of Barrie's characters who realizes in the shadow of the altar that he is a born bachelor. Dick Abinger, or, to give him his pen-name, "Noble Simms", in *When a Man's Single*, goes through the same experience. It is therefore justifiable, I think, to suggest that Barrie had always had a suspicion that he might be temperamentally unfitted for married life, and that by the time

[1] *Tommy and Grizel*, p. 264.

he wrote *Tommy and Grizel* he knew it for a fact. This is, and must remain, a guess; but it agrees with the impressions of those of Barrie's old friends to whom I have mentioned it. One of them said flatly: "He should not have married, and he knew it. That is why he became friends again with his wife after she left him."[1]

Though *Tommy and Grizel* represents Barrie's high water mark as a novelist, it is, like all his novels, uneven—almost one might say lopsided. It was Barrie's way as a journalist (a way which he passed on to Tommy Sandys as a writer) to work most easily "in character". Tommy tells Grizel that some must write from their own character, but that it is to him a chariot that won't budge. "I have to assume a character, and then away we go." Barrie in *The Greenwood Hat* says that James Anon nearly always, except in his early articles, liked to assume a character, and that it was done to avoid identifying himself with any views. That is all very well for journalism, where the views expressed by the assumed character are those of the writer, and the character is a mere cloak for self-consciousness. In imaginative writing, where the character to be assumed is one altogether different from his own, Barrie finds transmigration into another body very difficult indeed. In *Tommy and Grizel* the two chief characters are brilliantly alive, because Barrie has created them out of the depths of his nature, and his knowledge of himself and his mother. But when he tries to draw Alice, Lady Pippinworth, the cold, heartless huntress of men who is Tommy's bad angel, he fails almost completely. Never for an instant does he show that sympathy which a

[1] In Barrie's will appears the entry: "To my dear Mary Cannon [sic], with my affectionate regards, £1000 and an annuity of £600."

writer must feel even for those of his characters of whom he profoundly disapproves. She is nothing but a lay figure with a rather ridiculously sinister expression. And Elspeth, Tommy's sister, is another lay figure with an expression of set sweetness.

Because Barrie, even at the age of forty, still suffered from this inability to bring fully to life any character that he saw objectively, I am convinced that those of his admirers who bitterly deplored his increasing preoccupation with the theatre were wrong. The lack of form in his novels was not simply a question of faulty technique, which he might be expected to improve with practice; it corresponded to the curious mixture of deeps and shallows in his nature. When he had form imposed upon him by the rigid necessities of the theatre, he became instantly a craftsman of the highest order. In Harley Granville-Barker's phrase, his Pegasus went better in harness. Also, in the theatre the disproportionate contrast between deeps and shallows was not so clearly visible. Lady Pippinworth in the novel was nothing but an author's puppet. But if she had been put into a play, and had been worked upon at rehearsal by an actress of quality, a producer of vision and the author himself, she might have been given, if not life itself, at least the semblance of life. For example, Lady Sybil Tenterden[1] in *What Every Woman Knows* is a character in the Pippinworth class. She is not a real woman—but she is an actable part.

Barrie was to become a more completely equipped artist in the theatre than he could ever have been

[1] Her name was originally Lazenby, but was changed in the published play to avoid confusion with the Lasenby family in *The Admirable Crichton*.

outside it, and therefore an almost forgotten event which took place just before the publication of *Tommy and Grizel* is a very important landmark in his career. This was the production of his play, *The Wedding Guest*, at the Garrick Theatre on 27th September, 1900. To the astonishment of all theatrical London, this proved to be no gentle comedy but a tensely serious affair in which an artist on the point of marriage finds himself confronted by a discarded mistress, mother of his child. The critics, having recovered from their initial surprise, detected signs of the Ibsen influence, and fell to joyously. William Archer, as Prime Ibsenite, welcomed Barrie into the fold as " our new dramatist ". Clement Scott was now no longer on *The Daily Telegraph* to lead the opposing forces, but his successor assumed his mantle for the occasion. The play, in which H. B. Irving and Violet Vanbrugh played the leading parts, ran well for two months and then collapsed. Barrie never attempted anything in this manner again, and was no doubt wise to refrain; the importance of *The Wedding Guest* to us lies not in any intrinsic merit that it may have had, but in the proof it gives that its author had now dropped his " rather contemptuous " attitude to the theatre. All his plays, till now, had been in the nature of highly successful pot-boilers; and he showed what he thought of them himself by not allowing them, in spite of their success, to appear in print.

No artist of any kind enjoys being adversely criticized, for his work is so much a part of him that he cannot help being hurt when it is roughly handled. Some artists are so sensitive under criticism that they cannot help imputing malice, or at the best stupidity, to the critic. Others, stronger of fibre, wait till their feeling

of injury has abated and then examine what criticism has had to say in the hope that they may find something to profit by. This was Barrie's way, as he says himself; and so we may imagine him retiring to his little study at 133 Gloucester Road and deciding, in the light of the reception of *The Wedding Guest* by critics and general public alike, that his intention to take the theatre more seriously did not mean that he must write more serious plays, but simply that he must give the theatre the best of himself. He had started off boldly, but in the wrong direction. He must take a step back and begin again.

He had done with Thrums as a setting; but he must still rely on Thrums as a source of inspiration, if only because his youthful memories were so much the most vivid. Casting back among these memories, or perhaps searching his last novel for dramatic material, he remembered the two Misses Adam and their genteel little school in Kirriemuir. He had already turned them to good use in the *Tommy* books, setting them in the blue and white room which in real life belonged to his married sister Isabella, and inventing a broken romance for one of them. Now he saw in that broken romance a delicate little comedy, to be set no longer in the Thrums of his boyhood, but in the England of Jane Austen and the Napoleonic wars—but still in the blue and white room. And so, taking his favourite stroll in Kensington Gardens (where about this time he made friends with a family of small boys, sons of Gerald du Maurier's beautiful sister, Sylvia Llewelyn Davies), he thought out *Quality Street*, the first of the series of plays which put to silence those who were still saying that Barrie had no true vocation for the theatre.

It is not a big play; but in it we see, for the first time, the artist (who knows what he wants to say) and the craftsman (who knows how to say it) working together in complete accord and with complete success. For the first time, also, Barrie is telling in the theatre a story which could not be so well expressed in any other medium. The central incident of *Quality Street* is the masquerade of Phœbe Throssel as her imaginary niece, Livvy. The thirty-year-old schoolmistress, worn out with years of drudgery, flings off her cap and shakes out her ringlets in a defiant gesture to show that her youth is not lost but only in hiding—and is, to all appearance, a girl again. Such a story might be difficult to make plausible in a novel, where the reader may decline to take the author's word for it that Phœbe can carry off the imposture. The playgoer has never a doubt, because the imposture is carried out before his eyes.

The very fragility of its plot makes this play an achievement all the more remarkable. It depends for momentum not upon a tale that moves forward of its own weight, but simply upon its author's skill in keeping it going. Nothing in Barrie's whole range of writing is much more remarkable than the dramatic inventiveness with which he contrives, particularly in the last act, to make threads of gossamer take the strain of dramatic tension without snapping. Nowhere has he achieved a more perfect blend of humour and sentiment, or shown a lighter and surer touch. That this was no happy accident can be proved—supposing proof to be needed—by two letters sent by Barrie to Seymour Hicks during the London run of the play. Hicks was playing the dashing Valentine Brown, and Frohman

had told Barrie that their leading actor was indulging his incorrigible habit of " gagging ". Barrie went in to see, but Hicks—as he confessed with the half-mischievous, half-guilty grin of a naughty boy when he showed me the letters—got wind of the author's presence and took out his " improvements ". In the first of the letters, therefore, dated 22nd November, 1902, Barrie writes that he does not understand Frohman's message, and that he is cabling to him " Quality Street is played exactly as we rehearsed it ". But a little later, Barrie slipped in again to see the play, and this time the naughty boy was caught. Barrie writes on 24th February, 1903:

I find that a good deal both in words and business has crept into the latter part of the 4th act of " Quality Street " that was not in it when produced. . . . My feeling is that in this part of the play (and not in any other, for I think you better than ever in the serious parts) we have got out of the spirit of the piece and what I meant for comedy has become farce.

I am anxious for Frohman to see the production at its best and I wish you would have a rehearsal of this scene only of the last act and cut out all words and business that were not in the piece as I left it. If you would like me to come down and go over it with you I shall do so with pleasure. You see in a play of this kind if the delicacy goes the strong [1] thing is gone.

Quality Street was produced in New York on 11th November, 1901, with Maude Adams as Phœbe; but for some reason Frohman waited nearly a year before bringing it to London. It came to the Vaudeville Theatre on 17th September, 1902, and it ran for 459 performances, Ellaline Terriss playing Phœbe to her

[1] This word is an indecipherable whorl in the original. " Strong " is the only guess I can find which fits both the shape of the whorl and the meaning of the sentence.

husband's Valentine. Even Archer could not lament the loss of his proselyte in the face of this enchanting romance; and only six weeks later that most solid and sound of critics had reason to hope that after all " our new dramatist " might be able to find his own way to do more important work, for on 4th November, 1902, *The Admirable Crichton* was staged at the Duke of York's Theatre. H. B. Irving played Bill Crichton, the perfect butler who, wrecked on a desert island with the rest of the survivors from the yacht of his master the Earl of Loam, becomes in two years, by natural selection, the ruler of the island. The other castaways, aristocrats though they have been in ordinary life, are proud to be his subjects; and the haughty Lady Mary—played by Barrie's old friend, Irene Vanbrugh—is overwhelmed by the honour he does her when he chooses her for his consort. But they are rescued, and automatically butler and lady go back to their former stations.

The play caused a sensation, by reason not so much of its dramatic merits as of its implied social criticism. People discussed its subversive ideas with enormous solemnity. Archer questioned whether Barrie had the slightest idea of the immensity of the attack which he had delivered on the existing system—and in this he was no doubt right, for it is most unlikely that Barrie had intended to deliver any attack at all. H. M. Walbrook, looking back after the war, came to the conclusion that the dramatic critics of the time had taken the comedy much too seriously, since the aristocrats of the play are figures of farce rather than comedy. My own view is that the social criticism in the play was purely accidental. Conan Doyle claims a modest share

in the conception of *The Admirable Crichton*, saying that he once suggested to Barrie, when they were out for a walk, that there might be a good story in the idea of master and man cast away on a desert island, when the man, being better able to cope with the situation, would become master. That this was the main point of the play to Barrie is proved by his remark in *The Greenwood Hat* that he wrote the third act of this play before writing acts one and two; and this also shows that the characters were invented to fit the dramatic situation, not to point an argument. In other words, the aristocrats were shown as fools or weaklings because the story required fools and weaklings, and not because Barrie thought that aristocrats were necessarily either foolish or weak. If the Lady Mary of the third act is to be both a trim young Amazon who can outrun a buck and kill it with a home-made bow and arrow, and a deft parlour-maid who serves a meal to Crichton with the devotion of an acolyte serving a shrine, then the more languid, the more dependent on and contemptuous of her servants is the Lady Mary of the first act, the more effective will be the contrast in the theatre.

The accident that this story touched a sensitive spot in the social consciousness of the time has spoilt the play's chance of survival. Although *The Admirable Crichton* ranks among the very best of Barrie's plays, it has " dated " as the others have not. Barrie himself seems later on to have regretted that this idea had not come to him after instead of before the war, for in 1920 he wrote a new last act for the play in which Crichton no longer accepted meekly the return to his old subservient position. But such afterthoughts rarely succeed. *The Admirable Crichton* had too much artistic integrity

in its original form to bear being tinkered with. It had a theme that was universal, but its treatment turned it into a piece of social satire, which is perhaps the most ephemeral of all kinds of writing.

Chapter IX

PETER PAN

SOME time in 1902 the Barries migrated from the south to the north side of Kensington Gardens, their new house being Leinster Corner, overlooking the Park at Lancaster Gate. Barrie's friendship with the Davies children was now firmly established, and he brought to his games with them a child's zest and a man's breadth of imagination. He had a genius for games, as his wife tells us in her book. His romps with Porthos, the big St. Bernard, which were enjoyed equally by both participants and did not cease till both were exhausted, often made a shambles of the little Gloucester Road house, and one of the reasons given for leaving it was that Porthos needed more room. Barrie's games with the small boys were more elaborate, and the rarest of all his printed works is the single surviving copy of *The Boy Castaways of Black Lake Island,* " published by J. M. Barrie in the Gloucester Road, 1901 ". This describes itself as " a record of the terrible adventures of three brothers in the summer of 1901, faithfully set forth by No. 3 " [1]; and it is an embroidery on the games of pirates and red Indians which Barrie and his youthful gang played at Barrie's country house, Black Lake Cottage, near Farnham.

Meanwhile, in Kensington Gardens themselves, an-

[1] No. 3, now Peter Davies, the publisher, was about four at the time.

other saga was coming into being. References to this can be found in the dedication "To the Five" which Barrie wrote to the play *Peter Pan*, when at last it was published in 1928, but at the time all that Barrie allowed the public to know of it was part of *The Little White Bird*, which came out in November, 1902, and set the staider critics sadly by the ears because it was called a novel and turned out to be nothing of the sort. It was more completely lacking in form than any other book even of his. Some of its chapters were separate pieces, previously published, and now dragged in to make part of a rambling tale into which they fitted with some unease; it wandered out of the real world into fairy-land and back in the most disconcerting way, without warning, explanation, or apology. One thing, however, was certain. By whatever label it was described, this curious composition was utterly charming. The critics gave up the attempt to classify, and went on to praise. And thus Barrie took formal possession of that half-world which lies on the borders between realism and fantasy, and of which he has been the undisputed king ever since.

To the general body of readers, *The Little White Bird* is chiefly known as the book which gave Peter Pan for the first time to the world. Peter walks into the middle of the book without warning, becomes its chief inhabitant for five chapters, and departs as unceremoniously as he came, and he represents Barrie's first attempt to give a local habitation and a name to the great game of make-believe which he and the Davies children played together. But the book is of more interest than that to the theatre-lover, for in it is to be found the original idea, not only of *Peter Pan*, but of

every long play that Barrie was ever to write into which enters the fantastic element. The ball scene in *A Kiss for Cinderella*, for example, is to be found here, already worked out in one or two of its details, in the chapter called " The Pleasantest Club in London ", where Irene, the little Cockney nursemaid, tells the child David the story of Cinderella with herself as its unconscious heroine. The main idea of *Dear Brutus* is to be found in one of the maxims of old Solomon Caw, who rules the Island in the Serpentine: " In this world there are no second chances." And in the chapter called " A Night-Piece " is a passage about the ghosts of dead young mothers, who come back into the world to find out how their children fare. This is a clear foreshadowing of *Mary Rose*. Indeed, the scene in which Mary Rose meets her son grown up, and will not own him because he is no longer the child she knew, is already set down in full.

To the biographer, *The Little White Bird* is full of significance. The book has nothing in it of the kind of personal reminiscence that went to the making of *Sentimental Tommy*, though it is true that Porthos, the St. Bernard, is introduced under his own name and with his own peculiar habits (especially a fondness for mechanical toys). On the other hand, one cannot read far in it without beginning to realize that Porthos's imaginary master, Captain W., is drawn pretty closely to the measure of Porthos's real master. The description of this lonely bachelor, his sorrow for the love he has lost and his yearning for fatherhood, is charged with a profound and poignant emotion such as Barrie only achieved when his own feelings were deeply engaged. In some passages the sense of thwarted paternity is strong enough to make the book embarrassing to read.

The success of *The Little White Bird* was the crowning event of a very full year for Barrie, and as both *Quality Street* and *The Admirable Crichton* continued to run merrily throughout the spring and summer of 1903, it was perhaps not surprising that he produced no work of major importance in that year. He was not idle, however, for in September, just after *The Admirable Crichton* had been taken off at last, he staged at Wyndham's a curious gastronomical morality-play called *Little Mary*. This was little more than a casual comment on the habit of the English upper class of eating too much. Its heroine was an Irish girl, who cured the " best people " of most of their ills by putting them on a regime prescribed by a mysterious oracle whom she called Little Mary. The revelation which came at the end of the play, that this being was in fact the stomach, was a most successful theatrical surprise on the first night, but it was thought that once the joke was known people would not trouble to see the play. On the contrary, it ran for 208 performances at Wyndham's, and added a phrase to the language. For years afterwards we were accustomed to refer to our stomachs as our little maries, though most of us would have been hard put to it to explain whence the expression came, or why it meant what it did mean. The play was never published, nor is it ever likely to be revived except as a curiosity.

Barrie had a collaborator in *Little Mary*. One day at the Davies' house he gave " No. 2 ", who was about ten at the time, a large package of sweets, and the boy's mother warned him that if he ate them all at once he would be sick in the morning. " Not in the morning, mummy—to-night," was the answer; and Barrie

embodied the line in his play, drawing up a delightful burlesque of a legal agreement in which J. M. Barrie (to be hereafter called the aforesaid) undertook to pay John Ll. Davies (to be hereafter called the above-mentioned) the sum of one halfpenny per diem during the run of the play of which he was part author. The date of this document is 6th December, 1903, by which time *Little Mary* had already been running some weeks, so perhaps at its first production the play may have been Barrie's unaided work [1].

After this, nothing more from Barrie's pen appeared in the London theatre for over a year. *The Admirable Crichton* was produced in New York, with William Gillette in the name part. *Quality Street* ran its course. *Little Mary* disappeared, and with it No. 2's independent income. Then, some time in the autumn of 1904, Charles Frohman began to stop his friends in the street and tell them of a wonderful new play that Barrie had just given him, an extraordinary affair about a being called Peter Pan, who was half a very ordinary boy and half a fairy. Barrie himself had no great hope that the play would have much appeal to the public, but his own affection for it was so great that he must put it to the test. As a practical man of the theatre he saw that it would be immensely expensive to produce, and to make up to Frohman for the loss he would have to face, he had written another play called *Alice Sit-by-the-Fire*, which was almost certain to succeed since it was in

[1] This incident had a counterpart long afterwards. In his last years Barrie was a frequent visitor at Glamis Castle. Princess Margaret Rose entertained him to tea there on her third birthday, and showed him one of her presents which had specially pleased her. Barrie said, "Is that really yours?" and the little girl answered, "It is yours and mine." The spontaneous tact of this so delighted Barrie that he used it in *The Boy David*, which he was writing at the time.

his usual vein and had a good part for Ellen Terry.

Frohman's faith in Barrie was by this time so great that he had promised to put on both plays without reading either, and with the author's warning sounding in his ears he must have sat down to the manuscript of *Peter Pan* with some trepidation. But from the moment he read it he fell in love with the play, and it became a labour of love with him to see that Barrie's ideas should be carried out as fully as lavish expenditure and theatrical ingenuity could contrive. All kinds of mechanical effects were necessary. Four of the characters had to fly—not merely swing to and fro at the end of wires, as fairy ballets were accustomed to do in pantomimes, but fly about a room, perch on a mantelpiece, and depart by a window. We have grown so used to these things now that we take them for granted, forgetting that when they were first attempted they were portentous novelties. Frohman took difficulties in his stride, and never lost confidence. Rehearsals went forward with the company pledged to secrecy, and in the atmosphere of hope mingled with doubt that is the special characteristic of the stage; but theatre people are always suspicious of anything new, and doubt must have predominated. Barrie tells of a depressed-looking man who would appear from time to time out of the shadows carrying a pot of paint or a mug of tea, sigh like a reproachful ghost in the author's ear that the gallery boys would never stand it, and vanish. But when the play was produced at the Duke of York's on 27th December, 1904, the gallery boys were captivated like everybody else. There was an immense chorus of praise, and Frohman, back in America by this time and anxiously waiting for news, had the proudest moment of his life.

" It was alway yet the trick of our English nation, if they have a good thing, to make it too common." Shakespeare knew his England, and if he had lived later would have found America no less given to the same fault. *Peter Pan* was and is a masterpiece, but its admirers on both sides of the Atlantic have done it the great disservice of making it a cult. That is, they have claimed too much for it, and so have brought into existence by natural reaction a body of opinion predisposed to give it less than its due. A very eminent critic told me once that he never hears Peter Pan's cry, " I don't want to go to school and learn solemn things . . . I want always to be a little boy and have fun," without a shudder of disgust. Well, it is true enough that the sentiment is not a very exalted one, and true again (this, of course, is what the critic in question meant) that Peter's words reflect Barrie's own reluctance, when he became a man, to put away childish things. But a critic who feels scorn or disgust for this reluctance is failing in the first duty of criticism, which is to meet the artist on his own ground. He is blaming Barrie for not being St. Paul, when St. Paul was the last person on earth that Barrie would have wished to be. The fact that Barrie was always looking back with longing to " the dear dead days that were so much the best ", and that he could say with sincerity that nothing that happens after we are twelve matters very much, prevented him from finding happiness and peace of mind; but it made him as an artist. Now, with his powers at their fullest maturity, with his memory of his own youth, vivid as it already was, made more vivid still by his friendship with " The Five ", he was able to pour into the composition of *Peter Pan* the quintessence

of all that lay deepest in himself. It is thus that great plays are written; and *Peter Pan*, even though it looks backwards rather than forwards, is a great play.

Barrie says he has no recollection of writing it, and the statement is so fantastically unlikely that one is inclined to believe it. In one sense, he had been writing it all his life. The little boy of seven, who with James Robb staged an entertainment in a tiny Kirriemuir wash-house that was the original of Wendy's house; the young schoolboy whose chief horror it was that some day he would have to give up his games, and could not see how it was to be done; the older schoolboy who played a sort of pirate Odyssey in a garden at Dumfries—all these were already collaborating in the work. Tommy Sandys, in *Tommy and Grizel*, has an idea for a fantasy about a boy who would not grow up. Peter Pan himself appears, as we have seen, in *The Little White Bird*, but here he has not much in common with the hero of the play, for he is a naked baby of a week old; a part which no star actress would care to play. It was in Barrie's games with "The Five", in Kensington Gardens and on the Black Lake, that the threads began to be drawn together, and this gives just enough justification for his explanation that he obtained the Peter Pan of the play by rubbing all five of them violently together. It is a pretty figure of speech in the best Barrie manner, but it does not disturb our knowledge that Peter is Barrie himself, and that Wendy, like Grizel as a girl, was drawn from Margaret Ogilvy.

Wendy had no part in the Black Lake saga, but Porthos had; and so Porthos is the real original of the dog Nana in the play. His sex had to be changed, however, and in the end his breed was altered too; for by

Donald McLeish

THE PETER PAN STATUE IN KENSINGTON GARDENS, LONDON

the time the play was ready for the stage Porthos was dead, and a Newfoundland, Luath, had succeeded him; and it was Luath's coat that was copied for Nana.

Nina Boucicault acted Peter on that memorable first night, and those who saw her will not have it that she has been surpassed by any of the lengthening list of actresses who have played the part since. She did not play it very often, however, for after 145 performances Frohman took the play off, having decided to treat it as a Christmas entertainment, with revivals each year so long as the public should remain faithful; and at the first revival, in 1905, she was succeeded by Cecilia Loftus. Meanwhile, on 6th November, 1905, Maude Adams had appeared as Peter in New York. Here Frohman allowed the play to run its full course, and Miss Adams's success swept the country. The play became an institution in two worlds, and is still an institution here. For more than thirty years it has been revived every Christmas, in its original scenery and with no more than a few incidental changes. No other play in the history of the theatre has had to stand such a test, for most " classics " have the advantage of fresh interpretation to prevent their traditions from growing musty. Yet, stained and staled as it now is, *Peter Pan* still shines like a fine jewel in a tarnished setting. That mixture of humour and sentiment which was the best of Barrie's magic is untouched—and perhaps untouchable—by time. Here and there, when the mixture has failed to fuse, we have touches of mawkishness, or obvious stage tricks such as the popular but nauseous appeal to the audience to clap its hands if it believes in fairies. This incident was not in the play originally,

and the appeal seems to have been made for the first time by Maude Adams in New York. It is possible, therefore, that Barrie was not primarily responsible for it, though he has since assumed responsibility by including it in the published version of the play. However, such lapses into sentimentality are very few, and do not affect the structure of the play or spoil its fabric.

How strong that structure is, and how liberally shot with gold the fabric, time has shown. Barrie speaks, in his dedication, of a score of acts that had to be left out when he came to give the Peter Pan saga to the public in "the thin form of a play"; and that is the impression one gets from *Peter Pan*, of material so abundant and so ready to the author's hand that he was embarrassed to know what to leave out rather than what to put in. His omissions are, in fact, masterly. Writing as a child for children, he takes the child's privilege of skipping awkward explanations. Yet so sure is his step in this borderland country of his that we never question his most surprising statements—we accept the dog nurse, and Hook's Charles the Second clothes, and Smee's sewing machine as calmly as we accept the more usual appurtenances of fairyland. And so complete is his hold over any audience that is ready and able to give him a child's sympathy, that the narrative tension of the tale never slackens even when—as in the Mermaid's Lagoon, which is a detachable act, written in after the play was first produced, and often omitted since—the narrative itself stops dead. Was ever subtle burlesque better blended with genuine excitement than in the scene on Hook's ship? But indeed, Captain Hook ranks as one of the great comic creations of our time. Like Pistol, he is a villain above life size,

who has brought grandiloquence to a fine art; but he is a better stage figure than Pistol, who often eludes the actor.

When *Peter Pan* ended its original run, it was succeeded at the Duke of York's by *Alice Sit-by-the-Fire*, on 5th April, 1905. Barrie and Frohman could afford to smile now at the idea that the profits on this play had been relied on to pay for the losses on the bigger venture, and the smile must have grown a little ironic when the new play proved hardly able to do more than pay for itself. It was a rather thin little comedy, which contained the promised good part for Ellen Terry and very little else. There was some gentle satire at the expense of conventional comedies of the day, with their mechanical seduction scenes; there was some gentler satire still at the propensity of adolescent youth to regard these plays as an exact mirror of life; there was Ellen Terry as a wise and humorous mother, guiding her young but cocksure daughter through a ridiculous adventure without letting her find out that from first to last she had been making a fool of herself. With the proverbial Terry charm superimposed upon the Barrie charm, this little play had every chance. But it lacked strength to run for more than 115 performances, which by the standards of actress and author was something far short of success. The play was a short one, and the evening's entertainment was filled out by the production of a fantasy in one act, *Pantaloon*, whose interest lies less in its own merits than in the fact that it was Barrie's first attempt, since he had become an experienced dramatist, in the shorter form of which he was soon to prove himself a master.

Chapter X

SHORT PLAYS

TO the end of his life Barrie was what Stevenson had once called him, "a very Scotty Scot"; but little by little the centre of his existence was shifting south, and one by one the ties that bound him to his native place were snapping. David Barrie, his father, had died in June, 1902, at the good old age of eighty-eight. He might have lived many years more, but he was knocked down while crossing a road, and, though not badly hurt, did not long survive the shock to his system. In November of the following year Sara, Barrie's only surviving unmarried sister, died very suddenly, leaving her uncle, David Ogilvy, in sole possession of Strathview and bereft of his devoted housekeeper. And on 25th August, 1904, he too died. The house now became the property of Alexander, Barrie's elder brother, who retired to it in 1907, when his long service as Inspector of Schools came to an end. The fact that he was now a visitor in his old home is oddly reflected in Barrie's writing. In his earlier plays Scotland, if it appeared at all, was always the country in which the characters lived (as in *The Little Minister*) or to which they went (as in *The Professor's Love Story*). Now it became the country from which they migrated, or to which they paid a short visit.

What Every Woman Knows was his next big play;

indeed, it was his next play of any kind except for a very damp political squib called *Josephine*, produced at the Comedy on 5th April, 1906, and *Punch*, an unsuccessful skit on Bernard Shaw, which served it as curtain-raiser. The two chief characters in *What Every Woman Knows* are both Scots, and the first two acts of the play pass in Scotland. But the whole force of the action comes from the fact that these two, John Shand and Maggie Wylie, his wife, go South to conquer England, and that John finds, to his great surprise, that without the humble and despised Maggie he cannot make his conquest. This comedy ranks, perhaps, just below Barrie's very best, but it is an endearing piece of work which lingers gratefully in the memory. Chiefly this is due to the character of Maggie Wylie, the wise Scotswoman who knows so much better than anybody else exactly how dependent upon her is the husband who thinks himself the sole architect of his own fortunes. Maggie is Margaret Ogilvy once again, but with an individuality of her own as well. John and Maggie were played by two of the triumphant *Peter Pan* cast. Gerald du Maurier, who had been not only Mr. Darling but a magnificently comic Hook as well, again showed, as a Scots railway porter, that his range was not as limited as some people liked to pretend; and Hilda Trevelyan won all hearts with a Maggie who, quite rightly, was her Wendy grown up and speaking with a Scottish accent.

The transition from middle-class Scotland to upper-class England in this play is done with a realistic certainty new in Barrie's work. It is true, as I have said already, that Lady Sybil Tenterden has too much about her of Sentimental Tommy's Lady Pippinworth; but

the Comtesse de la Brière, the frivolous, shrewd Frenchwoman who sees what Maggie Wylie is up to and is no more content than Puck in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* to let well alone, is quite another story. She is the best character belonging to his new world that Barrie has yet drawn, and her value to the play is not easy to overestimate. *What Every Woman Knows* was produced at the Duke of York's on 3rd September, 1908, and had a run of 384 performances. The New York production followed on 23rd December with Maude Adams as Maggie, and that, too, had an enormous success. But this triumphal progress of a play about a marriage that began badly but ended well must have seemed to Barrie an ironic twist of circumstance a few months later. The play was still running, when, in July, 1909, he found that his wife had a lover, and that she wanted him to divorce her. The news came as a complete surprise and a terrible shock, and he did everything that he could to persuade her to stay with him. She, however, recognizing with a directness characteristic of her that all was over between them, refused either to let him forgive her or to agree to a separation, and on 13th October, 1909, he brought an action and obtained a divorce.

The break-up of his marriage dealt Barrie a blow from which he never fully recovered, and for the time being it brought down his private world in ruins. In his work from this time onwards there was apt to be a note of disillusion and sense of failure; the cheerful, boyish optimism of his earlier romances was gone. Barrie himself, conscious of the change, made a characteristic joke about it in *The Greenwood Hat*, accounting for it by the attack of writer's cramp which compelled

him, a few years after this,[1] to write with his left hand instead of his right (no great hardship, as he was naturally left-handed). Worse than this, he seemed to have lost the zest for writing, and to be unable to face the effort of planning anything on a big scale. For six or seven years he produced nothing but one-act plays, some of which may have been in his desk already at the time of his divorce. The only long play which he completed during this time was not merely a failure but, as I shall show when the time comes, was an ill-advised attempt to expand a one-act play already in existence.

There is a point about the order of Barrie's one-act plays which is worth noticing. When he collected the best of his plays into one volume in 1928, he first printed the full-length compositions in the order in which they had been written and produced, except for *Peter Pan*, which had to come at the beginning because it had before it the long dedication "To the Five", which now served as preface to the book. After the long plays come the short ones, but they do not stand at all in order of production. Barrie has arranged them like this: *Pantaloon*, *Half an Hour*, *Seven Women*, *Old Friends*, *Rosalind*, *The Will*, *The Twelve-Pound Look*, four war plays, and *Shall We Join the Ladies?* This order is roughly chronological, for the first seven were written before the war, the next four in the war years, and the last one after the war. The thought came to me that it might be *exactly* chronological, the order being that in which Barrie had *written* the plays. For a time I took this seriously as a theory, but I finally gave it up when an examination of the war plays in the volume proved

[1] According to his own account, after the writing of *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals*.

that they are *not* arranged in order of composition. These four plays are *The New Word*, *A Well-Remembered Voice*, *Barbara's Wedding*, and *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals*, in that order. It is an attested fact that *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals* was first produced in April, 1917; and in *A Well-Remembered Voice* there is a reference to meat-tickets, which did not come into use till the beginning of 1918. This seems to me conclusive.

One thing, however, did become clear while I was investigating this point. Barrie had a way of burying his one-act plays as a dog buries bones, and only dug them up when he happened to want one, and could remember where it was. When he wrote a full-length play, he always found a manager, generally Frohman, standing at his elbow while he finished it, ready to snap it up before the ink was dry. Not even his least characteristic writings in that form "hung fire". It was different with short plays. Even when it was by Barrie, a one-act play could never be certain of immediate production because the demand for such pieces was not great. The steady retreat of the dinner-hour later and later into the evening had shortened the theatre programmes. In mid-Victorian days playgoers would have felt defrauded if they had been offered an evening's entertainment consisting of one play only, but in the late Edwardian times of which I am now writing one play a night had already come to be the rule, staged at an hour to suit the late diners. Now and then, when a play was shorter than usual, managers would remember the old tradition and put on a "curtain-raiser". But when Barrie began to write his one-act plays even the "curtain-raiser" was beginning to drop out of fashion.

It is not very surprising, therefore, if Barrie allowed

his one-act plays to accumulate in his desk. He wrote them on impulse, while an idea was hot in his mind, and without worrying his head about chances of production. Also, he was vague and casual about them to a degree. There is a story, for instance, that when Frohman started a repertory theatre scheme at the Duke of York's in 1910, and had Granville-Barker as one of his right-hand men, Barker wanted some one-act plays for a triple bill and asked Barrie if he had anything of the sort. Barrie thought he had one somewhere, written six months before, probably in a drawer of his desk. Barker rummaged, and found *The Twelve-Pound Look*. This tale is related by Frohman's biographers, and probably, like many stories in their interesting but unreliable book, is true in essence but inaccurate in detail. For one thing, Barrie's contribution to the triple bill was not one play, but two, *Old Friends* being the other. The story, therefore, cannot be accepted as it stands.

The Twelve-Pound Look was Barrie's first production after the divorce proceedings, and I do not think it needs a stretch of imagination to suggest that it is a transmutation into story form of his own feelings at the time. Just as in *Tommy and Grizel* he made the worst of himself into a sentimentalist, so now he made the worst of himself into Sir Harry Sims, the man successful in every worldly respect and yet a failure in his private life. The play was produced at the Duke of York's on 1st March, 1910, and from the first it had a very great success. Besides *Old Friends*, it had as companion in the triple bill a dramatic dialogue by George Meredith, *The Sentimentalists*, which the critics agreed would have been a charming piece of work to read. We may suspect

that Barrie influenced the choice of this fragment (for it was no more) as a tribute to his old and much-admired friend, who had died nearly a year before; but Meredith was no dramatist. *Old Friends* had no great merit, though Barrie had enough affection for it to publish it. It is a very ordinary little piece, with the hereditary craving for drink as a theme. After this run was over, these two pieces went on to the shelf; but *The Twelve-Pound Look* refused to be forgotten. It was revived in the following year at the Little Theatre, and soon afterwards it gave its author a new and very unexpected experience.

The managers of the great systems of music-halls, which in those unmechanical days were the chief popular houses of entertainment, had discovered that their audiences liked seeing famous stage actors and actresses in good short plays. Irene Vanbrugh had an offer to "go on the halls" which Dion Boucicault, her husband and producer, who had staged several of Barrie's plays for him, thought that she ought to accept. The play she wanted for this purpose was *The Twelve-Pound Look*; but Barrie had a prejudice against music-halls, thinking that his work was unlikely to appeal to big popular audiences, and he refused to let her do the play.[1] Miss Vanbrugh pleaded so hard, however, that at last, as a gesture of friendship to the actress, he allowed himself to be persuaded. Much to his astonishment, he found on visiting the London Hippodrome that the play went even better before its new public than in the regular theatre. His prejudice vanished. Indeed, he confessed

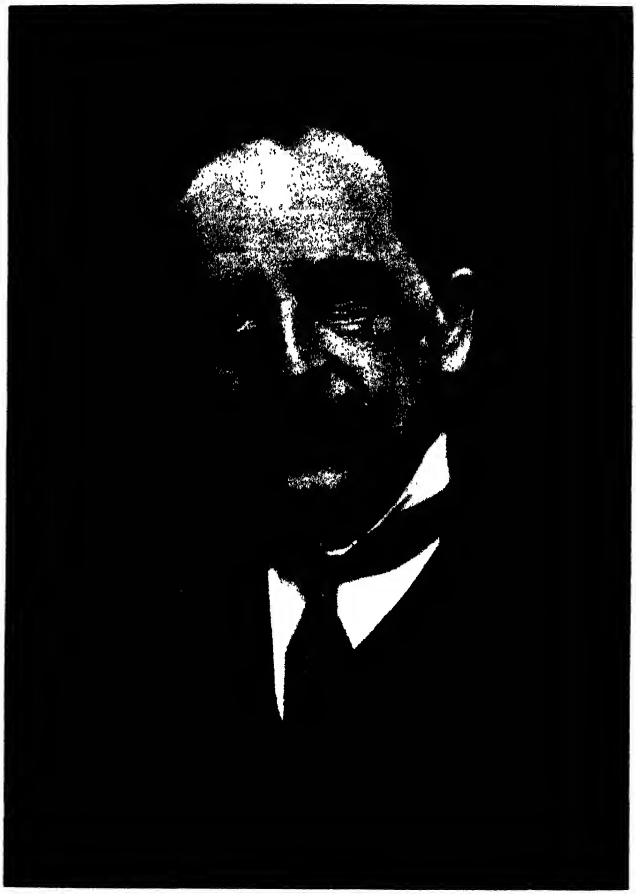
[1] A curious coincidence may be noted here. In an article on the music-hall contributed to *Time* in 1889 (referred to on p. 52) Barrie pronounced this form of entertainment "mostly stupid and vulgar". But he went on to say that its tone was improving, and added that the rate of progress "would be increased if the proprietors were allowed to produce stage-plays, as of course they ought to be".

that he actually preferred the music-hall audience, with its direct, hearty expression of its opinions, to the politer but less responsive, and therefore less inspiring, audience of the theatre. After that, Miss Vanbrugh had a triumphal progress with *The Twelve-Pound Look*, and Barrie found a new outlet for his ideas. In September, 1913, *Half an Hour* was given its first stage production at the Hippodrome, Miss Vanbrugh playing the heroine, and a topical skit on the censorship, *The Dramatists Get What They Want*, was contributed to the revue, *Hullo, Ragtime*, at the same theatre a month later.

Meanwhile, in 1911, Barrie had gone back to his former love with the publication of *Peter and Wendy*, which was the story of the play *Peter Pan* retold in the form of a novel. Once again he showed his firm determination to keep the two forms of composition apart. The book followed the main lines of the play, it is true, but it was a novel in conception and execution. If anybody could pick it up and read it now without having heard of the play, he would find nothing of the theatre sticking to it. This Peter Pan of the Neverland is not quite the original Peter of Kensington Gardens, but neither is he the Peter Pan whom Pauline Chase was now impersonating each year at the Duke of York's Theatre. Indeed, the differences between book and play disconcerted the many sentimentalists who had by this time lost all sense of proportion, regarded the play as a kind of holy writ, and visited it in much the same frame of mind as if its performance were a religious ritual. These worshippers were presented, in the next year, with an appropriately sentimental idol for their adoration in the shape of Frampton's pretty-pretty statue of Peter Pan, which was set up in Kensington Gardens.

Rosalind was Barrie's only new production in 1912. It is a charming trifle, with something in it of *Quality Street*, for it tells how a young man, very much in love with an actress, goes on a walking tour and finds (as he thinks) the actress's mother, revelling in middle-aged comfort. In reality it is the actress herself, taking a rest from the necessity to be gay and young. Barrie's flair for stage effect has never been better shown than at the end of this play. A telegram recalls the actress to London to play Rosalind, and she changes herself almost before our eyes (to-day, I suppose, she would do it actually before our eyes) from middle-aged frump to brilliant young dazzler. *Rosalind* was part of yet another triple bill at the Duke of York's, and in spite of the fact that the other two plays were the work of Shaw and Pinero, it outlasted them both, and gave Irene Vanbrugh a chance that no actress of her ability could possibly have missed.

The next year brought yet another mark of success; on 14th June, Barrie was made a baronet. It is said that he had been offered a knighthood in 1909, but had refused it on account of his impending divorce. It must have been with a sense of tragic irony that he, to whom the parental relation had always meant so much more than any other, now accepted a hereditary title which nobody would inherit. Perhaps something of this feeling was behind the remark he made at the private and informal dinner which some of his friends gave to celebrate the event: "When I began writing novels, people said they were not real novels. When I began writing plays, folk said they were not real plays. I expect men are going about now saying I am not a real baronet." Perhaps it is to this feeling that we must



L. Caswall Smith

J. M. Barrie
(1913)

relate the bitterness of *The Will*, which was produced about ten weeks later, on 4th September, at the Duke of York's.

The critics were impressed by *The Will*, as indeed they had cause to be; and their praise was all the more emphatic because the chief event of the same evening, Barrie's first new long play for five years, was a dismal failure. This was a comedy called *The Adored One*, which has the strangest and most chequered history of any play that Barrie wrote. It has not been published, but its first act is practically identical with the one-act play, *Seven Women*, which is in the collected edition of the plays. A naval officer, arriving at a house where he is to dine, finds that his hostess has asked him half an hour too early. His host, before disappearing apologetically to get dressed, enumerates the women who are expected to dinner—there are among them, for instance, a woman with no sense of humour, one with almost too much, a coquette, a devoted mother, and a murderess. After the host goes upstairs, Leonora arrives, and the sailor whiles away the time in trying to discover which of the various women she is, only to find in the end that she is herself all seven, including the murderess. Thus far *Seven Women*; and thus far Barrie had a delighted audience for *The Adored One*. But then it turned out, in the long play, that the lady really *was* a murderess. She had pushed a man out of a railway-carriage because he had insisted on keeping the window open, when her little girl had a cold. The play went on to a trial scene in the Gilbert and Sullivan manner, in which Leonora won the hearts of the jury and was acquitted against all the evidence. There was no indication that this was intended for burlesque, and the curtain fell, for the

first and last time in Barrie's career, to the sound of hisses. For once, he had failed to make his fantasy fuse with his realism.

Barrie deferred to criticism he found just, as was his way, and went quickly to work to remodel the play. It was now made clear that Leonora was not really a murderess, and that the trial scene was only a dream. It was too late, however; the damage was done. Not even Mrs. Patrick Campbell's acting as Leonora had been able to prevent the word from going round that the play was a bad one, and the revision was too late to save it. But Barrie had his consolation. On 5th January, 1914, the new version of the play was produced in New York as *The Legend of Leonora*, with Maude Adams in the name-part, and had a success. The New York critics accused the London public of lack of humour for having rejected the play, which, in all the circumstances, was not quite fair to London. And in the end, London had the chance to show that it was not blind to the quality of the best part of the play, for when Irene Vanbrugh appeared four years later in *Seven Women*, she had almost as great a success with Leonora as with Rosalind. *Seven Women* gives us the strongest proof that exists of Barrie's bone-burying propensity with his short plays. It has been generally assumed, because its first production came so long after that of *The Adored One*, that what Barrie had here done was to take the one undeniably effective act of his despised long play and round it off to make a new " one-acter ". Irene Vanbrugh is my authority for saying that the process really worked the other way round. To her knowledge, the one-act version of the story is the original. The other two acts were tacked on, with a good deal less than

Barrie's usual skill, when a demand rose for a new long play.

The next new production in 1913 was *Half an Hour*. This went into a variety programme at the Hippodrome on 29th September, not four weeks after *The Adored One* had had its stormy reception; and it too, though it met nothing but praise, promptly became the subject of controversy. It was a highly concentrated play of tense, swift action, timed to occupy just half an hour in playing (the rule in music-halls was that no play might last longer). Irene Vanbrugh took the part of Lady Lilian Garson, a wife who leaves her brute of a husband in order to go to Egypt with her lover. He, going out to look for a cab, is run over in the street and killed; a doctor who happens to be passing breaks the news to Lady Lilian. She, in desperation, and not knowing what else to do, goes back to her house, contrives to dress in time for dinner and destroy the evidence of her flight—and finds that the doctor of the previous scene is a guest at her table. After the first performance of this piece, an indignant playgoer wrote to *The Times* complaining of the deleterious influence which writing for the music-halls was likely to have on dramatists of Barrie's standing, since a fine idea for a three-act play had here been sacrificed to the need for speed and sensation. Albert de Courville, then manager of the Hippodrome, answered the objector neatly and completely by saying that the play had not been specially written for that or any other variety theatre, that Frohman himself had told Barrie that the plot was good enough for a long play and it was a pity to waste it, and that it was by Barrie's own determination that the play had been kept to the shorter length.

If, as I still feel may have been the case, Barrie had a vague chronological order in his mind when he arranged his one-act plays for publication, we have here a possible reason why he put *Half an Hour* so surprisingly early in the order. May he not have written it many years before, and then have felt, as Frohman and *The Times* letter-writer clearly felt, that the plot was too good to waste on a one-act play? May he not have kept it by him with the idea of turning it into a big play some day; and then, when it came to the point, have felt too weary to make the effort? This is, admittedly, a guess; but not, I hope, a wild one.

Chapter XI

THE WAR YEARS

AT the outbreak of the war Barrie, in common with the rest of his countrymen, was faced by the necessity of adjusting himself to a world turned suddenly upside down. Like the nation in general, he began with an outburst of indignation at the invasion of Belgium, and then settled to the long business of keeping a stout heart and making the best of things. *Der Tag*, produced at the Coliseum on 21st December, 1914, was the one direct comment upon the war that he made in the theatre. It was a fine *pièce d'occasion*. It had some of the faults inherent in all art that is made to serve a political purpose, but it put into dignified language the cause for which the Allies were fighting, and was memorably acted by Norman McKinnel as the Kaiser and Irene Vanbrugh as the Spirit of Culture. Then Barrie, never very happy in the world of affairs, went back to his characteristic vein. War-time England, with its alternation of gaiety and sadness, was akin to something in his own nature. He was to do some of his best work during those years.

He led off badly, however. Gaby Deslys, a French music-hall performer with good looks but no conspicuous talent except for the wearing of clothes which contrived to be at the same time voluminous and scanty, was then a favourite with London audiences. Barrie,

for some odd reason, conceived a great admiration for her and wrote a revue, called *Rosy Rapture, or the Pride of the Beauty Chorus*, specially designed for her. Frohman put it on at the Duke of York's on 22nd March, 1915, and it failed completely. It was a curious trait in Barrie's character that he never could bring himself to admit that he had no ability for devising this kind of entertainment. *Rosy Rapture* went the way of *Jane Annie, Josephine* and *Punch*, and in the reverberations of its fall people hardly noticed that a piece of work in Barrie's most characteristic style, a short play called *The New Word*, had been dragged down with it. H. M. Walbrook paints an ironic picture of Mlle Deslys, at the end of this melancholy affair, bowing among masses of floral tributes and blowing kisses to a bored and resentful audience, anxious only to escape. This brought to an inauspicious close the partnership between manager and author which had meant so much not only to Barrie but to the theatre in two countries. The *Lusitania* was torpedoed a few weeks later, on 7th May, 1915, and Charles Frohman went down in her.

The New Word was the first of the short war-time plays which Barrie has preserved. Unlike the plays which were written in the stable conditions of peace time, each of these war plays contains internal evidence which tells us the approximate date at which it was written. We should be able to tell, even if we did not know that it was produced in March, 1915, that *The New Word* was written early in the war. The new word itself, which is " second-lieutenant ", would show that. Also, the young subaltern who is showing himself off to his parents in his new uniform still wears a sword; and his mother still has a hope that the fighting will

all be over before he has time to finish his training. The play is only a trifle, based on the idea, always a favourite of Barrie's, of the embarrassment which attacks two grown-up male relatives when for any reason they have to confess their liking for one another. This habit of undemonstrativeness is not, perhaps, carried to the same lengths in England as in Barrie's native country, and one may doubt whether an average English lawyer and his son would be quite so suspicious of one another as the two in *The New Word*. All the same, the little play has a germ of truth, and its mixture of sentiment and humour proves that Barrie had found his own special touch again.

While we are on this subject of father and son, perhaps it will be well to consider, out of its place, Barrie's other, and much more serious, play on the same subject. *A Well-Remembered Voice*, written and produced in 1918, shows us a married couple whose son has been killed at the Front, and it is written with that absolute command of an unforced pathos which comes to Barrie only when he is writing out of his own experience. Though he had no son of his own, he had stood in the relation of a father to "The Five" ever since the tragic and untimely death of both their parents, and had sent them all to Eton; and George, the eldest of them, was killed at the Front while *The New Word* and *Rosy Rapture* were in rehearsal. It is no wonder, therefore, that *A Well-Remembered Voice* is full of personal touches, and that for once in Barrie's writings there is an admission that the feeling between father and son can be deeper and truer even than that between a son and his mother. The mother in this play is utterly desolated by her son's death. She wears deep mourning, she cannot

bear to read the papers, she spends her time at futile séances in which she imagines herself to be in touch with her son's spirit. Her husband, on the other hand, is "carrying on" much as usual, and it is generally felt that this, added to his unsympathetic attitude to the spiritualism, is an additional cross for his noble wife to bear.

Then, one evening, the boy's spirit returns. He may only appear to one of his parents, and he has chosen his father because he now knows that his mother is not the one who misses him most. Father and son (the son, by the way, is nothing but a voice to the audience, though to his father he is not only a visible but a palpable presence) have a conversation whose poignant quality is its matter-of-fact friendliness, its Eton gossip, its fishing technicalities, its story of how Dick's dog has eaten the cook's meat-tickets, all the familiar touches of the life about him which Barrie, at his best, always used to such heart-breaking effect. Dick knows now that death is a little thing; and in the light of that knowledge his father learns for the moment to believe it too. When he prepared this play for publication, Barrie followed his usual custom of illuminating his text with literary additions, and he began with an account of what the mother and son had been to one another in life; how she had tried hard, or fairly hard, to conceal her husband's deficiencies from Dick (but Dick knew); how all the lovely things which happened in that house had been between her and Dick, with the father gently but firmly shut out. Is there here, perhaps, a belated realization that old David Barrie, sitting with his Bible in the corner at Strathview, may have felt himself shut out from all the lovely things that were

between Margaret Ogilvy and her son and daughter?

After *The New Word* nothing of any significance came from Barrie for the rest of 1915. *The Fatal Typist*, described by Walbrook as " one of the author's practical jokes " was given a performance at a matinée in aid of the Australian wounded in November at His Majesty's, and has not been heard of since. But on 16th March, 1916, *A Kiss for Cinderella* was produced at Wyndham's, and proved that Barrie was at last getting back to his true form. This was the first full-length play he had written for eight years (I do not count *The Adored One*, for reasons already given). Though not one of his best, it was as characteristic as any. Once again he showed his unique talent for blending reality—even the unpromising reality of war-time—with fantasy; and while the merging of the one world into the other is not done with quite the uncanny skill shown in *Peter Pan*, *Dear Brutus* or *Mary Rose*, it was done quite well enough to please the war-time audiences, half soldiers on leave who were not disposed to be minutely critical. It ran for 156 performances.

The weakness of the play is in its first two acts, as a recent attempt to revive it has proved. They lay no solid foundation, and the pathetic little drudge, Miss Thing, who mothers unwanted babies and runs an establishment called " The Penny Friend ", where for a penny she will shave you, or doctor you, or tailor you, or comfort you, is never allowed to have two feet on the ground. Consequently, we hardly know in which of Barrie's two worlds we are supposed to be, and the dream scene, where his little heroine turns into Cinderella at her ball, with her policeman friend as the Prince, loses some of its effect. The last act, where Cinderella

is in a quite definitely real hospital, recovering from a genuinely dangerous illness, and her slow-witted but "romantical" policeman is clearly and certainly in love with her, is the best of them all. It is never Barrie's artistry that is at fault in this play, but only his craftsmanship.

"Cinderella" in this play is the little Cockney nurse Irene out of *The Little White Bird*, as we have seen already; but her habit of "mothering" babies in cradles made out of packing-cases she gets from Moira in *Little Mary*, and her mixture of practical good sense with imagination from all the succession of Barrie heroines back through Grizel to Margaret Ogilvy. She gave Hilda Trevelyan an opportunity to show herself at her most enchanting, and the scenes between her and Gerald du Maurier as the Policeman, especially the love-scene at the end, were the old authentic blend of sentiment and humour. Barrie was himself again, and those of his admirers who believed that his best work might be still to come were given new reason to hope. Another practical joke, *Shakespeare's Legacy*, followed a month later, and then, after a year's gap, *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals*.

This, longer by nearly half than the other short pieces, is full of the true Barrie magic. One is inclined to ask, perhaps, in the opening scene, whether Barrie really knew much about the intimate talk of London charwomen, for he never quite spoke the vernacular of his "beloved solitary London" like a native. But when the brawny rough Black Watch private, all agog with suspicion that a liberty has been taken with him, faces the meek old lady who is longing to "mother" him but knows that she must be very cunning if she is to be given the chance, then a real breath

of Scotland[1] comes to a dingy London basement, and the author knows every inflection of voice, every twist of thought of them both. The craftsmanship, also, is delicate and sure. This play is good to read, but far better to see, for with the unforced skill of which he was becoming more and more a master, Barrie saw to it that the most expressive moments of the play are conveyed in action rather than words. I do not refer here only to the last scene of all, in which Mrs. Dowey, after Kenneth is killed, looks through her few relics of him before setting out with mop and pail for her day's work, but to such moments as the one, early in the play, where we first realize that the "son" of whom she has been bragging is, in fact, a stranger, and that he is about to arrive and demand an explanation. The part of Mrs. Dowey was given to Jean Cadell, a practically unknown actress whom Barrie had seen when she played in a revival of *The Little Minister* in 1914; and she made her name in it. In the same bill with *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals* at the New Theatre was *Seven Women*, staged at last in its original form with Irene Vanbrugh as Leonora.

Six months more went by, and then, at Wyndham's Theatre on 17th October, 1917, *Dear Brutus* was produced. This, to my mind the best of all Barrie's comedies, is also the most astringent; but it seemed to a war-weary world to be almost a frolic. The critics saw only its gay humour, its delicate fancy and exquisitely-handled sentiment, and the fact that it was in no sense whatever a war play. Nobody seemed to see till later that it was, as Barrie himself described it many years

[1] Barrie has told us that in writing *The Old Lady* he was thinking of his Edinburgh landlady, Mrs. Edwards.

later, an uncomfortable play such as he could only have written with his left hand. The germ of this play had been in his mind ever since he gave old Solomon Caw of Kensington Gardens the maxim " In this world there are no second chances "; but now, in a more disillusioned mood, he amended the maxim to read, " If there were second chances in this world, few of us would take them ". The message of the play is as uncomfortable as it well can be. Eight people go out into Lob's magic wood at the end of the first act to seek a second chance; only one is a better being in the wood than out of it—and he the only one who did not whine about his luck before he went. If we are underlings it is our own fault; but only the exceptional people can rise to be anything better.

Yet this bitter warning not to expect too much of ourselves leaves us, in the theatre, full of an uplifting hope. Not only its first audiences felt this; it is the actual effect of the play. Patrick Chalmers, in *The Barrie Inspiration*, refers to it as a play " of sheer romantic refreshment and of optimism which sent an audience out into the dark streets again, happy, grateful and reassured ". And I must confess that I myself, writing in 1921, included it without misgiving in a list of plays which had the quality of " sunshine ", and was startled when somebody asked me why. The paradox is not difficult to explain, however. There are two good reasons why an audience seeing *Dear Brutus* in the theatre swallows the pill and tastes only the jam. One is that people listening to a story have a primitive tendency to concentrate their interest on the fate of the hero and heroine, and to be quite callous about the misfortunes of minor characters. The hero and heroine

of *Dear Brutus* are Will and Alice Dearth. They are the two exceptional people of the play, who are capable of learning by their adventures in the wood. Dearth regains his self-confidence; Alice learns that she is better off as she is than she would have been if she had married the other man; she knows now that she has dragged Dearth down, not he her, and she has courage to face that knowledge. There is a hint that they will come together, and that the dream-daughter Margaret will no longer be a might-have-been. That is the first reason, and the second is perhaps only the same one in a different dress. It is that we are all, to ourselves, the heroes and heroines of our own little dramas; we all have a conviction that if there is a chance for exceptional people then there is hope for us.

How *Dear Brutus* stands in relation to the rest of Barrie's plays as an artistic achievement is a question which I would rather keep for consideration at the end of this book, when all the plays have been discussed. But here is the place to discuss the perfection to which Barrie had now brought his craftsmanship, for no better example is to be found than the opening act of *Dear Brutus*. It is the object of art to conceal artifice, and because hardly anything that seems natural in the theatre really is so, the dramatist has more to conceal than most artists. The problems which Barrie set himself in *Dear Brutus* were not easy ones. He had not, for instance, the comparatively simple task of establishing an atmosphere of fantasy at once, as he had done in *Peter Pan* by raising the curtain on a nursery with a dog-kennel in it and the entry of Michael on the back of Nana loudly refusing to be bathed. Since this was to be a serious comedy about real people, he had first

to establish a world of normal reality and then, almost at once, to superimpose upon it a world of fantasy which the audience must accept without question. Till this was done, the real business of the play could not begin, therefore it must be done as quickly as possible; yet at the same time the foundation of the individual character-drawing must be laid. Before the revelation came at the end of the act, that for anybody who went into the magic wood there would be a second chance, it must be shown clearly what each one of the eight characters hoped to find there. In fact, Barrie had fifty minutes or so in which to make a mass of explanations, none of them simple, some of them—Lob's identity with Puck, for instance—frankly incredible, and to make them sound as though they were not explanations at all.

How brilliantly he set about his task the first few pages of the play bear witness. Nothing could be more normal and ordinary than the scene on which the curtain rises. The five ladies of a country house-party have just left the dining-room, where the men are sitting over the port, and one man—husband of the dark discontented woman who seems to be taking the lead—is likely to do the decanter more than justice. Something is afoot, but something quite normal, for it has to do with a telegram which the discontented one is writing out. The butler comes in with coffee, is accused of stealing rings, confesses, and is given the alternative of going to prison or of explaining to the assembly what is the mysterious thing they all have in common, on account of which Lob has asked them all to his house on Midsummer Eve. And so, barely five minutes after the beginning of the play, the knowledge

that these are ordinary people about to undergo some extraordinary adventure is already present in the minds of the audience. A dramatist of less skill might easily have taken twice as long to explain half as much, and have achieved no sense of action whatever.

It is to be noticed, also, with what ease and skill Barrie induces us to suspend our disbelief in the idea of the magic wood. First of all we hear of it from the butler, who dare only hint at what he suspects, but obviously believes in the wood and is terrified of it. Therefore, when the men come in and begin to discuss it in detail, but flippantly and without belief, we already know more than they do. Their incredulity destroys ours. We *know* there is such a wood, just as Lob and Matey the butler know it, and we suspect that the incredulous ones will be wandering in it before very long. The wood established in our minds, it only remains for the author to present it to our eyes. There is, however, a practical difficulty here. Since it is Midsummer Eve, and warm enough for the company to go wandering about the country-side in search of adventure, the windows looking on to Lob's garden are wide open, and the curtains drawn back. If the garden is to be changed into a wood, the dramatist knows that he must get those curtains drawn so that the scene-shifters may do their work; yet if he draws them without a good excuse, the audience may suspect his purpose, and so the dramatic effect will be spoilt when, later, Dearth throws back the curtain and shows that the trees have crept right up to the house in the eerie moonlight. The only way to close the curtains without attracting undue attention is to make the act of closing them part of the play, and this is done with a most deceptive cunning.

Mabel Purdie, about to enter from the garden, sees her husband, the philanderer, kissing Joanna Trout. She draws back, but they have heard her; so she comes in, and with a word of ironic apology, draws the curtains so that the other guests may not see what she has seen. I have shown that it was Barrie's little way to pretend that he did not know how plays were written. Did he not, indeed?

Dear Brutus ran for 365 performances, almost till the end of the war, and a great part of its success was due to the scene between Dearth and his daughter Margaret in the wood. Nothing that Barrie wrote for the stage in all his long career was more touching than this scene. The broken-down artist who in the first act had got himself drunk in order to keep his self-distaste at bay was now seen as a clear-eyed, contented man, no great shakes as a painter perhaps, but happy in his work and happier still in his love for Margaret. The relation between parent and child was here given complete expression. Margaret and her father had an understanding so perfect and yet so human, and both of them under its influence radiated such a delight in life, that our knowledge that they were creatures of a dream which must break up about them if Dearth approached the house again was almost too poignant to be borne. The acting of Gerald du Maurier and Faith Celli in this scene was unforgettable, and only five years went by before they acted the same parts in a revival of the play which ran at the same theatre for another 258 performances. It was always one of Barrie's chief virtues in the theatre that he gave his actors chances to show themselves at their best, but in this scene he surpassed himself.

A Well-Remembered Voice was produced at Wyndham's on 28th June, 1918, and this completes the tale of Barrie's war-time plays. Some time during 1917 or 1918, however, he must have written *Barbara's Wedding.* This was " buried " for many years, and Hammerton gives the date of its composition as 1915. There is proof, however, in the text of the play itself that it could not have been written before the middle of 1917 at the earliest; for Barbara's marriage is to Captain Dering, who at the outbreak of the war had been the Colonel's gardener, and it is nearly three years since Billy, the Colonel's grandson whom Barbara had expected to marry, was killed in action. This little piece is skilfully planned and written, and if it had been produced at the time of its composition would have had its appeal. But by August, 1927, when Robert Loraine produced it at the Savoy, its sentiment seemed a trifle over-sweet.

Chapter XII

MARY ROSE AND AFTER

THE war ended, the lights of London were lit again, and the sweep of the Thames with its seven bridges could once more be admired by night as well as by day from Barrie's high window in Adelphi Terrace House. After its first outburst of relief, the country settled down in a grim frame of mind to the business of adjusting itself to a new set of conditions. The plays and books of the time reflected the general mood, and the world seemed to be full of morbid young cynics drowning their sorrows. Anybody who at that time remembered that laughter was a thing that could be done on the right side of the face, or that it was possible to be sad without being suicidal, was doubly welcome. Barrie, who knew more about depression and bitterness than the young cynics were ever likely to learn, now earned our gratitude twice over—first, in 1919, for sponsoring *The Young Visiters*; and then, in 1920, for having written *Mary Rose*.

About *The Young Visiters* there still hangs a faint air of mystery, owing to the absolute conviction of some people, even now, that Barrie was himself its author. Patrick Chalmers, the latest commentator at the moment when I write this sentence, has not a doubt on the subject, saying that the connoisseur in Barrie can come to no other conclusion. For all that, I believe that the

book is what it purports to be, a story written by Daisy Ashford as a child of nine. The publishers' guarantee that it is so, which Mr. Chalmers airily dismisses, seems to me to have a certain weight, and Barrie's own solemn asseveration is in a tone which he does not employ when he is " just saying things ". On the other hand, he was never one to spoil a joke for a ha'porth of truth, and I have no doubt he touched Miss Ashford's manuscript up, just as he touched up some of his own old writings when he republished them in *The Greenwood Hat.* I have always suspected that the moment when Mr. Salteena " ate the egg which Ethel had so kindly laid for him " was a little too good to be true. Be that as it may, it was Barrie's prestige, and Barrie's preface, that gave the book its send-off and made it the happiest literary joke of the year. Later on it was turned into a play by two ladies, and had a run of over 100 performances at the Court Theatre. During its run two Barrie plays were put on—*The Truth about the Russian Dancers*, a minor piece designed to show Tamara Karsavina's skill, and produced at the Coliseum; and *Mary Rose.*

Mary Rose was produced at the Haymarket on 22nd April, 1920. It proved to be the last of Barrie's great successes in the theatre, and one of his best plays—to many people, I suppose, it is his best. It ran for 399 performances, and it gave to yet another fine actress, Fay Compton, one of her most memorable parts. Yet to me this play, though certainly a gem, is a gem with a fatal flaw in it. It is easier, though, to say that the flaw exists than to explain with certainty where it lies. The dramatic critic's approach to a play differs from the literary critic's approach to a book in no way more

widely than in this, that he does not think about a play until it is over. As Desmond MacCarthy once put it in an illuminating phrase, he lets the play wash over him, and then examines the markings in the sand; and sometimes, though the markings may be clear enough, he finds it difficult to say what has caused them. Every time *Mary Rose* has washed over me I have found the same markings in my own little strip of sand, and they indicate that I have not responded emotionally to the appeal of the story. Why? I think it is because Barrie has weighted the scales too heavily against his heroine. He is not content with the old simple tale of the human being who, having been rapt away into another and more beautiful world, returns to the world of men but is no longer able to find peace or happiness in it. He adds to it another idea of his own, which is not at all simple—the one already mentioned which occurs in *The Little White Bird*, that the only ghosts are the ghosts of young mothers searching for their babies, and hating them when they find them grown up. That is an idea in Barrie's most sentimental vein, and it blends very badly with the older story.

In James Hogg's *Kilmeny*, which may have put *Mary Rose* into Barrie's mind, the girl who is carried away into the "land of thought" returns to earth because of her love for her native land, and goes back again because she is now too good and pure for this world. The thought is simple and clear, that after a taste of Paradise no earthly things can have value. But Barrie's addition is neither simple nor clear. What order of heavenly being can this be, which heaps misery on misery for Mary Rose, and keeps her spirit earth-bound in frantic search long after she has forgotten even what

she is searching for? There is some suggestion that she is being punished because in Paradise (or wherever she had gone) she pined too bitterly for her baby. It seems a punishment unworthy of Paradise. One reflects that the glorious beings of the Land of Thought would not have treated Kilmeny so, and is forced to the conclusion that the real reason for Mary Rose's sufferings is that an experienced dramatist has let his knowledge of theatrical effect carry him away. Barrie has, for once, piled on the agony too lavishly. But even so, *Mary Rose* remains one of the best of his plays, and one of the best plays of our time. The workmanship throughout is almost perfect, and even if the scene between the ghost of Mary Rose and her grown-up son Harry is faulty in conception, the skill with which it is accomplished, and kept on the right side of mawkishness, is masterly.

Mary Rose is another of Barrie's characters who do not grow up. She, like Sentimental Tommy, like Peter Pan, most of all like Barrie himself, clings desperately to her childhood. Mrs. Morland warns Simon that ever since her first disappearance on the island, Mary Rose has been curiously young for her age. Mary Rose herself is scared of marriage chiefly because she fears Simon may not let her play once she is his wife; and even when she is a ghost, she sometimes gives up her weary search for a little and plays by herself—and guiltily asks Harry not to " tell ". On the island, though she is a wife of four years' standing and her son is nearly three, Simon treats her, and she behaves, like a little girl pretending to be a married lady. And in the ghost scene, she talks like a bewildered child.

Barrie was sixty when *Mary Rose* was produced, but

as he was to live to be seventy-seven and to retain his faculties bright and clear to the end, he was by no means an old man. Some other reason must be found for the fact that after this he wrote no more plays for more than a dozen years. Perhaps the narrowness of his range accounts for it—he had now told all the tales that had been clamouring in his mind for expression, and though he had by no means " written himself out ", he must now rely on some stimulus outside himself to set his pen moving. Certainly he had such a stimulus for the only new dramatic composition of his that was seen in the theatre between *Mary Rose* and *The Boy David.* One of the Davies brothers, who collectively and individually took upon themselves the right of frank filial criticism of Barrie's work, challenged him to write a " thriller ". Barrie's response was *Shall We Join the Ladies?*

There has been much speculation about this little work, which appears in the published version as " the first act of an unfinished play ". Any statement made by Barrie about himself is received by his commentators with a scepticism that is almost automatic. It has been held by some that Barrie, for some strange elfin reason, wrote his disembodied act without any intention of carrying the story on. This, of course, is nonsense. It has been more widely, and more credibly, maintained that Barrie wrote the first act and then saw that he had made too brilliant a start, and would not be able to avoid slackening the dramatic tension in the remaining acts. He therefore abandoned the play. This theory makes sense, but I cannot believe it to be the true explanation. It is a fact that it is extremely difficult to live up to a very exciting first act, but it is absurd to

suggest that Barrie was not capable of doing it. In writing a " thriller " it is practically obligatory for an author to do what Barrie did with *The Admirable Crichton* —that is, to begin at or near the end, and work backwards. The first object of this kind of play is to lay false trails; and a man cannot lay false trails until he knows very certainly where the true trail leads.

It is not to be thought that Barrie, the best theatrical craftsman of his day, would have made so amateurish a blunder as to begin writing before he knew what the solution of his puzzle was to be, or without arranging a dramatic surprise for his concluding scene, or without having it very clear in his mind how the mystification of the audience was to be carried on in the second act. The existing act is the best proof of this, for it is a classic example of the art of dramatic preparation. Almost every line in it is carefully calculated to lead up to something in the next act. One of the twelve people sitting round Sam Smith's dinner-table poisoned Sam Smith's brother in Monte Carlo. At first it seems that none of them can have done it, but as the act proceeds it becomes clear that every one of them has something to hide. By the end of the act, all twelve are possible suspects, yet so far there is no real evidence against any individual. The act performs perfectly its proper functions, of arousing excitement in the story and interest in the characters, and of making a challenge to the detective instinct; but to say that it rouses anticipation to a pitch which no conceivable subsequent acts could satisfy is to overstate the case.

I have been confidently told, on authority that should be excellent, that Barrie's real reason for abandoning the play was very simple. Michael Llewelyn Davies,

No. 4 of " The Five ", now a boy of twenty up at Oxford, was drowned while bathing in a dangerous part of the Thames near Sandford Pool on 19th May, 1921. Barrie was struck to the heart; and the suggestion is that after this he could no longer bear to go on with the play. This sounds to me a better reason than the other, and it may well be the true one. Against it is the fact that Barrie had already given permission, before the boy's death, for the production of the unfinished work. It was actually in rehearsal at the time, with a glittering " all-star " cast, for the opening of the theatre of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art on 26th May. If Barrie had intended to go on with his play, it is easy to believe that its tragic associations may have made it impossible for him. But if he had intended to go on with it, why did he allow it to be staged in its unfinished condition? Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that the performance was to be a private one on a special occasion, and that the cast was one of the strongest that have ever appeared on a single stage at one moment. Be that as it may, the fragment caught the public interest, and was performed again at a charity matinée at the Palace. After that, Barrie having persisted in his intention not to finish the play, it was put into the regular bill at the St. Martin's on 8th March, 1922, as a curtain-raiser to Galsworthy's *Loyalties* and was acted there 407 times.

Not for many years after this was Barrie to meet any outside influence strong enough to set him writing another play. He was now acknowledged to stand at the very head of his profession, and the official recognition of this in the New Year honours list of 1922, when he was given the Order of Merit, met with general approval.

Only Meredith and Hardy among imaginative writers had so far held this most coveted distinction, and Barrie must have been proud to be given a place beside two men whom he knew as friends and profoundly admired as artists. The award came appropriately in time to mark what would naturally be called his retirement, but for the odd fact that it proved to be much more like an emergency from retirement. For a dozen years he had lived the life of a recluse, seeing only his personal friends; and although, like other quiet figures of history, he wielded an enormous influence because his hermitage became the resort of great men of all professions (and it would have much surprised James Anon, who had no interest in affairs, to see how often his successor consorted with eminent politicians), he had steadily refused to appear from behind the scenes. Not once during those years did he consent to speak before an audience—not even the small and indulgent audience that an after-dinner speaker has to face.

Even before his retirement to the Adelphi he had been a reluctant speaker. He had never addressed a big public audience; but even so each occasion, however trivial in itself, was an ordeal to him, involving great care in composition and unhappiness in anticipation. His method was to write his speeches out in full and get them by heart, and a most successful method it proved in practice. Once he was on his feet, his characteristic grimness about not being beaten came to his aid, and his inimitable technique (learnt at school) as a wooden-faced humorist carried him triumphantly through; but he always paid for his success afterwards with an acute nervous reaction. He might have persisted in his absolute refusal to face any more such

ordeals, but that, early in 1922, circumstances were too strong for him. St. Andrews University invited him to be its Rector. The post was too honourable and too much to Barrie's mind to be refused, and its acceptance involved the delivery of an address in public to an audience larger and more critical than he had ever yet faced.

He accepted, and went to work on his address with the care and the artistry which he would have brought to the writing of a new play. And on 3rd May, he delivered a speech on Courage which reverberated round the world, and ranked—and still ranks—with his best achievements. How little he trusted his powers as an orator on such a grand scale may be seen from the text of the speech itself. He apologized for his vocal shortcomings, he assumed that many of his audience would not hear what he said and assured them that they were the lucky ones, and he told them that this was his first public speech and was to be his last. But by the time his long address was over, he had destroyed all chance that he would be allowed to make these words good, and perhaps had destroyed his own self-distrust. The text of this speech, which was plainly too good to be lost, was afterwards published as a book; and in that form it later received a tribute which, for its happy ignorance no less than its obvious sincerity, must have appealed mightily to Barrie. In 1926, an American film journal invited various stars to write about their favourite books, and one world-famous lady, now forgotten, said that she had derived much inspiration from a little pamphlet called *Courage*, which was " a printing of an address given by a little-known English Episcopalian rector ".

Topical

J. M. Barrie and Dame Ellen Terry

At St. Andrews, on the occasion of his Rectorial Address, 3rd May, 1922

Barrie never again delivered a speech quite on this heroic scale. But St. Andrews had deprived him, if not of his reluctance to speak, at any rate of his excuse for not speaking, and for the future he was less difficult to persuade. Most of his big speeches were made on official occasions, as, for example, when he received the Freedom of Dumfries in 1924, of Jedburgh in 1928, or of Kirriemuir in 1930, or when, also in 1930, he was made Chancellor of his own old university. Sometimes, however, he could now be tempted to speak simply to oblige one of his friends. In 1922, at A. B. Walkley's invitation, he spoke at the dinner of the Critics' Circle; and the first sentence of his speech, directed dispassionately at the ceiling, was the one word, " Scum!" Two years later, at Wallasey, he addressed the girls of a school of which his niece Lilian, Alexander Barrie's daughter, was headmistress. Later still, in 1928, he allowed Stanley Baldwin, with whom he was on terms of warm friendship, to persuade him to speak to the Worcester Association.

Whatever the occasion, these speeches were listened to, and subsequently read, with the utmost eagerness. They were invariably witty and charming, but sometimes now they began to have a new quality—they were reminiscent. It was as though Barrie had found in his public speeches a new medium in which he might do in fact what he had done so often in fiction, live over again some of the best moments of his life. Indeed, it is very nearly true to say that Barrie spent the years 1922 to 1930 in writing his autobiography, not in the usual way, for Barrie never did anything in the usual way, but in instalments. Everything new that came from his pen between these years was full of memories

—not the speeches only, but the preface to *Peter Pan*, and *The Greenwood Hat* (of which the private edition was printed in 1930). Between them they amount to a far better autobiography than most men have the wit to write.

During much of this period of reminiscence, Barrie was steadily engaged on another retrospective task—the rewriting of his plays for publication, to which reference has already been made. Nothing that he did was more characteristic of him than this. His conviction that plays were intended for the stage, and therefore should not be put before the reading public, he shared with many other good theatre men, Shakespeare and Sheridan at their head. His method of overcoming the difficulty was all his own. To all intents and purposes, Barrie invented a new literary form when he prepared his plays for the press. The narrative passages which have taken the place of stage-directions are sometimes exquisite, but in some cases they have the regrettable effect of making the play seem less good than it actually is. This is particularly so in the introduction to *Dear Brutus*, where the description of Darkness and Light as the two chief characters of the play, and the elaborate passage about the moonshine and the flowers, is in Barrie's worst sentimental vein. Nowhere in the play itself does he descend to this level, except in the short scene where Lob comforts some flowers that he has knocked out of their bowl; the falsity of which is apparent, since if Lob had really felt like this about his flowers he would not have allowed them to be picked.

Another occasional occupation of Barrie's during these years was to write an "amateur" play for his friends. How many such compositions may exist I

do not know, but I have read one, an elaborate affair called *The Stanway Ghost.* This was written to be acted by Lord Wemyss and his grand-children at his house, Stanway in Worcestershire, at Christmas 1926. The plot had more than a touch of *Dear Brutus* about it, for the " ghost " of the title was a great wheel which appeared outside a window, as Lob's wood did. Through this each of the grand-children had to pass, and emerged as a grown-up.

In such tasks Barrie occupied his diminishing working hours until, in 1931, he had an opportunity to make a single and most impressive return to Fleet Street. He wrote a story for *The Times*, which was published as a special supplement to the Christmas Eve number of that year. No doubt it was his mood of reminiscence that made him go back to the Scotland of a bygone day for the setting of *Farewell, Miss Julie Logan.* This exquisite fantasy, the last prose tale he was ever to write, is too short to be called a novel; but it is long enough to show him still supreme in his own domain, which lies between the world of fact and the world of fancy, and is good neighbour to both.

Chapter XIII

THE LAST CHAPTER

TWO more years went quietly by, during which it seemed that Barrie's work was done. After September, 1931, when he unveiled a statue of his old friend Thomas Hardy in Dorchester, he made no public appearances of any great moment. Nothing was less likely than that any stimulus could be found strong enough to make him take up his pen again to write a new full-length play. But in December, 1933, Elisabeth Bergner, an actress who had left Germany on account of the rising anti-Jewish feeling in that country, made her first appearance on the London stage as a pathetic little waif in *Escape Me Never*. She became the talk of the town; Barrie paid one of his infrequent visits to the theatre to see her, and conceived an instant and profound admiration for her acting. Early in 1934, the rumour went round that he was writing a play for her, and by August of that year the play was finished and C. B. Cochran had agreed to present it.

It was easy to understand why Barrie had felt an artistic affinity with this actress, for her stage personality was exactly in tune with his own creations. She would have made an ideal Peter Pan, and people began to wonder whether something of the same kind was being provided for her. As in the case of *Peter Pan*, Barrie insisted on the strictest secrecy about the subject

of his play. For a year the secret was kept, but when preparations began to be made for production public curiosity became impassioned, and driblets of information leaked out. By August, 1935, all that was known was that Barrie had written "a play without a heroine". Then came a postponement owing to the illness of the actress, and this meant the end of Barrie's cherished scheme of springing a surprise. Somebody knew that the play was on a Biblical subject, somebody else that Bergner was to play a boy. At last, in October, 1935, it was announced that the play dealt with King David, and that the title would be either *The Two Farmers* or *The Two Shepherds*.

The date of production was now fixed for February, 1936, and a little later came an announcement that the play would be called *The Boy David*—a title which Barrie had had in his mind all along, but had suppressed as it would have given away the secret. Rehearsals had actually begun, when the actress fell ill again. Barrie was now nearly seventy-six, and his health was failing; it began to look as though Fate meant to rob him of his desire to see this last play of his (which, it was said, he considered to be his best) in action on the stage. Indeed, by the time rehearsals began again in the autumn he was not strong enough to appear at all of them. But on 21st November, 1936, the play was given its first performance at Edinburgh; and Barrie, though too ill to be present, was not too ill to get to work on his text in the light of criticisms that were made, and to make important alterations before the play came to London.

I have compared three different versions of this play —the original typescript, still untitled; the prompt book

(which, as it contains the alterations put in between the Edinburgh and the London productions, is almost two versions in itself); and the final printed text. In the main, the play remains the same throughout, but in the three scenes where Barrie gave his stage collaborators difficult problems to solve, there are constant alterations. These three scenes are the death of Goliath, Saul's attempt to kill David with his javelin, and David's vision of the future. In the first version Barrie wanted Goliath to be not the giant of the Bible, but a big man who could have a real running fight with David. Later, he changed his mind and asked for a giant, which proved ineffective on the Edinburgh stage; so that in the final version, acted and published, Goliath remained "off".

The javelin scene was more complicated. The order of events as originally written was that Saul and David were inside Goliath's tent, David playing the harp; that Saul flung his javelin, transfixing David and pinning him to the tent side; that Saul then rushed outside and told Samuel that he had "slain the Son of Jesse"; that Samuel prayed to God, who miraculously restored David to life; and that David then resumed his harp-playing as if nothing had happened. The scene was acted like this at Edinburgh, but all that the people in the audience were allowed to see was the head of Saul's javelin as it came through the tent wall; they therefore had no idea at all that David was supposed to have been killed and miraculously restored. The only interpretation they could put on the scene was that Saul, having flung his javelin, left the tent without seeing that it had missed its mark; and that David must now be sitting in the tent reflecting that

he had had a very narrow escape, and that to die would have been an awfully big adventure. Barrie saw that he had asked too much of his producer and his audience, and rewrote the scene leaving out Samuel altogether. As it was seen in London, and now stands in the published version, the close of this scene is one of the most moving in the play, and is a proof that to his life's end Barrie remained a practical man of the theatre, who never hesitated to cut and alter his work to fit the theatre's needs. In the same way the vision scene was cut and rewritten to fit the actors' needs, but in this scene the "cuts" have been restored in the published text.

At last, after its many vicissitudes, *The Boy David* was brought to London and produced at His Majesty's Theatre on 14th December, 1936. Cochran was as lavish as Frohman had been over *Peter Pan*, and public interest made the occasion the chief theatrical event of the year. The play was acknowledged to have in it all Barrie's old certainty of touch; yet it ran only for seven weeks, and had fewer performances than any play of his since he first entered the theatre, except for the out-and-out failures such as *Josephine* or *Rosy Rapture*. Barrie was bitterly grieved. Granville-Barker, in his preface to the published version of the play, says of him that up to the point when illness kept him from rehearsals, Barrie "had given of his best, and—secretly diffident as he could be about his work, and scrupulously, even harshly, critical—he thought it good, and that all promised well. He made no open complaint about the result; that was not his way. But the grief struck the deeper."

So far as workmanship was concerned, Barrie not

merely thought that *The Boy David* was good; he was a master of his craft, and he *knew* it was good. Granville-Barker's detailed analysis of the skill with which the dialogue is fashioned and the characters brought out is fascinating to follow, but it tells nothing that is new even to those—of whom I am one—who consider that *The Boy David* has no claim to rank with Barrie's best plays. It is not the detail of this piece that is at fault, but the design. To put the thing bluntly, either there is nothing wrong with *The Boy David* or it is all wrong. If it is wrong, it is wrong for the very reason which, to Barrie's mind,[1] made it triumphantly right—namely, that the part of David was written for Bergner and fitted her exactly. The theme of the play is a fine one; it is the old, tragic tale how the great man's pride makes him take credit to himself for a power that comes from God. This pride is full-blown in Saul, in David we see it only in the bud. It brings Saul down, and will do the same for David if he forgets to be humble in the day of his greatness. In the hero of such a tale, virility is the first quality that is needed. Barrie knew this well enough, for Saul has it in full measure, and in the visions of the future, when the boy David sees himself as a grown man, the virility of the older David is insisted on. How, then, can the hero of the tale be acted by a woman? How can he be turned into a wistful, sexless creature, own brother to Peter Pan, without allowing the tale to dwindle? The case against *The Boy David* is not that Barrie handled a big theme badly, but that he handled it perfectly in a small way.

[1] This is proved by Barrie's will, in which he left £2000 to Elisabeth Bergner "for the best performance ever given in any play of mine".

Never was a writer held in greater affection by his public than Barrie, and the proof was to be found in the general regret when his last play proved not to be a success. Even those critics who did not like it would have done so for his sake, if they could. It was not fitting that his career should end on a note of failure, even so honourable a failure as this. In spite of his way of brooding apart in his eyrie, people felt about him not as an aloof genius, but as a friend with whom they had in the past spent many happy hours, and with whom they now sympathized in his disappointment. Short of going to the theatre to see his play, they would have done anything in their power to comfort him in his distress, so potent was the magic of his personality, the disarming humour and pervasive charm of his writing.

But charm, and the hold that it has upon the popular imagination, is a dangerous element in the make-up of an artist who has a claim to greatness. It is so often used by second-rate artists to cover up their lack of solid qualities that we run the risk of thinking that if a man has charm he can have nothing else. As regards Barrie the danger is very great, more particularly in judging his work for the theatre, because its apparent ease and lightness often obscure its strength. The appeal of the theatre is to the emotions of an audience, not to its intellect, and therefore there is a perpetual temptation to a dramatist to get easy effects by writing sentimentally. In Barrie's case the temptation must have been specially strong, for the sentimental side of his own nature was always ready to pour out and sweep him away if he opened the sluice-gates. He needed constant watchfulness and an iron restraint if he was to guard himself against this besetting fault, all the more so because the

great majority of theatre-goers, sentimentalists themselves, were delighted when he yielded to it.

The final test of sentimentality—that is, of false emotion—in the theatre is repetition. There are fashions in mawkishness, and what brings tears from one generation often induces nausea in the next. No plays that have been written in our time have been subjected to that test more ruthlessly than Barrie's, and the astonishing thing is not how badly but how well they come through the ordeal. *Peter Pan* is, of course, the greatest example of this; it has been put to the proof unceasingly, and most of it is pure gold.

During the years while Barrie was writing, the theatre went through great changes, and the art of playwriting began to take itself seriously again after losing its self-respect for a period. In the history of that revival, it is easy to forget or take for granted the part that Barrie played—still more easy owing to his own way of taking hard work honestly done for granted in himself. He headed no movements, enunciated no theories, founded no school. Nevertheless, his part is a great one, for he brought to the theatre something of which it stood badly in need; an absolutely original mind. For a time, as he has said himself, he worked for the theatre with some contempt, as was the fashion among writers of the time, and wrote plays to the same pattern as everybody else. But when he learnt to respect the theatre, he soon began to make demands on it. He soon began to go outside the rigidly naturalistic convention which was the only one that playgoers then knew, and to try for effects which others had not dared to attempt. Granville-Barker has pointed out with his usual clarity of thought and word the new demands that Barrie made upon the

mechanics of the theatre, but even these were not so bold as the demands he made upon the imagination of his audiences. The plays that he wrote now were his own; good or bad, they were the work of J. M. Barrie, and nobody else in the world could have written them. His range was narrow, and he could not stray far outside it without disaster; but within that range he was a very great dramatist.

Will his work live? That question time alone can answer; all that we can say now is that his best work is as worthy of the attention of posterity as anything that has been written in English in his day. *Peter Pan* has already proved itself to contain imperishable elements. Other plays have kept their place in the theatrical repertory for many years and then vanished into oblivion; but no play in history, unless it was destined to become a classic, has maintained a constant hold on the public imagination right through a period in which both the mechanics of the theatre and the canons of popular taste underwent a revolution. *Peter Pan* is a portent. So long as it retains its copyright it belongs to a children's hospital, and this fact, combined with its undiminished appeal to the youngest generation of playgoers, will doubtless keep it alive for some time yet. Once the present series of annual revivals ceases, however, and the complicated settings and machinery are broken up and dispersed, the difficulty and expense of reproducing the play may tend to keep it on the shelf.

Of the other plays, *Dear Brutus* seems to me to have much the clearest claim on the interest of generations to come. Its theme is universal, and nothing in the telling of the story ties it to its own time, as the social satire in *The Admirable Crichton* or the political stuff in

What Every Woman Knows tie those two plays. And though two essays in pure narrative, *Mary Rose* and *Quality Street*, have a freshness not likely to decay with the operation of time, they have not the vigour which makes for survival. *Dear Brutus* has that vigour. Also, there is nothing in it that can puzzle posterity; and except for an odd passage here and there, easily to be cut or amended, there is nothing in it of sentimentality.

When James Barrie, as a young boy in Kirriemuir, first confessed his intention of becoming an author, his only support came from an old tailor in the town, who quoted, with an earnestness that the boy never forgot, Cowley's lines:

> What can I do to be for ever known
> And make the age to come my own?

Myriads of writers have set out to answer that question as best they could. Not many have been able to answer it more honourably than the man who, after a long life, could point to *Peter Pan*, *Dear Brutus* and *Margaret Ogilvy*.

The breakdown in Barrie's health which had prevented him from putting the final touches to *The Boy David* at Edinburgh proved to be premonitory of the end. He was able to go to rehearsals in London, but was not in the theatre on the first night. Soon afterwards he fell ill again, and spent his seventy-seventh birthday in bed. Early in June he was well enough to dine at the Garrick Club with Lord Horder, his doctor, but a few days later he developed pneumonia and was taken to a nursing-home, where he died on 19th June, 1937. He was buried at Kirriemuir five days later.

So passed from the scene one of the most romantic

and pathetic figures of our time. He had achieved almost every honour and success that James Anon could have coveted for him and he left one of the largest fortunes [1] ever made by a writer. By all material standards he was to be accounted the luckiest of men, but in his moods of despair he knew that the things he himself thought best worth having in life had never been his. And yet, if all were known, perhaps he wrote his own best epitaph when he said: "Those who bring happiness to others cannot keep it from themselves."

[1] £173,467.

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