

# THE PLAYS OF J. M. BARRIE

BY WILLIAM LYON PHELPS

PERHAPS the most intelligent attitude to take toward the plays of J. M. Barrie is unconditional surrender. If one unreservedly yields one's mind and heart to their enfolding charm, then one will understand them. Otherwise never.

J. M. Barrie is the foremost English-writing dramatist of our time, and his plays, taken together, make the most important contributions to the English drama since Sheridan. He unites the chief qualities of his contemporaries, and yet the last word to describe his work would be the word eclectic. For he is the most original of them all. He has the intellectual grasp of Galsworthy, the moral earnestness of Jones, the ironical mirth of Synge, the unearthly fantasy of Dunsany, the consistent logic of Ervine, the wit of Shaw, the technical excellence of Pinero. In addition to these qualities, he has a combination of charm and tenderness possessed by no other man. I am aware that the last two sentences will seem to many readers mere hyperbole. I will refer such doubters to the published plays.

That literary men cannot write plays is a lusty myth. Authors of inane, reverberating claptrap never tire of repeating it. Yet the three foremost playwrights of the modern English Theatre, Shaw, Galsworthy, Barrie, were all distinguished novelists before anyone thought of them in connection with the footlights. So was St. John Ervine; Dunsany was a writer of prose tales, and John Drinkwater a professional poet. To command an excellent literary style is not necessarily a fatal handicap.

Although Mr Barrie had written a number of books before *The Little Minister* appeared in 1891, it was this thrilling story that literally spread his fame over the wide earth. One of the most fortunate results of its publication was that it attracted the attention of Stevenson, on the other

side of the world. Stevenson's heart was always in Scotland; and the appearance of a good book by a Scotsman gave him a thrill quite unlike any other sensation. Twice he essayed to write a letter to his young countryman, and succeeded only at the third attempt. He seems to have been instantly aware of the extraordinary powers of the new man, and equally certain that *The Little Minister* was only a prologue to the swelling act.

In December, 1893, at the close of a longish letter, Stevenson was bold enough to write, "Whereupon I make you my salute with the firm remark that it is time to be done with trifling and give us a great book." Barrie replied by writing *Sentimental Tommy*, which Stevenson never lived to see in print, but the character and plot awakened his liveliest curiosity, all the more that in some features he was the hero; had he lived to see it completed, he would have welcomed it as one of the great British novels, which it undoubtedly is. The evidences of amateurishness in *The Little Minister* vanished, and we have the work of a master's hand.

It is an interesting fact that in the early nineties, two novelists of genius—who were later to become intimate friends—were both struggling to win distinction on the British stage; J. M. Barrie and Henry James. After a few false starts, the former fairly surpassed expectation; the later totally failed. The reasons for this failure are conclusively though unconsciously given by the aspirant himself, in the wonderful *Letters*, published in 1920. And the main reason is not because James failed to master the technique of the stage, while Barrie succeeded; the failure was inherent in the temperament and mental processes of the great American. In order to achieve the success in the theatre that he reached in short stories, novels, and literary criticism, Henry James would have required a play twelve hours long, a dialogue enunciated with the deliberation of a glacier, and an intellectual audience endowed with divine patience. For the effect produced in his novels—of which I am almost a fanatical admirer—is produced by the accumulation of atoms; one pauses in reading, one reflects, one reads back, one finally sees; and then, after finishing the last page, one really ought to read the whole book through again in the light of the conclusion. There is hardly time for that method at the theatre;

there, instead of an effect produced by a large collection of tiny units, one word, one gesture, one smile, or one silence must do it all.

Herein lies one of the chief elements in Barrie's success. He reveals a situation as a lightning flash reveals an object in gross darkness. It is probably necessary for ordinary aspirants to study the "technique of the drama"; I do not know, for I suppose I am the only white man who never wrote a play. But it is not necessary for genius. If a prize had been offered in 1605 for the best treatise on dramatic construction, I do not think Shakespeare could have secured honorable mention; while it is probable that Ben Jonson would have carried off the palm. Barrie is a great playwright because he understands human nature, knows how to represent it in conversation and in action, has enormous sympathy with his characters, and what is equally important, has enormous sympathy with the audience. His plays are full of action; and yet the story of each play can usually be given in a few sentences. What is it then, keeps the audience at strained attention? If some character ask a question, we would not miss the answer for all the world. His people capture us almost instantly, because, while composing the play, their creator himself felt their reality. They were right there, in the room with him. He saw their faces and heard their voices. In a conversation with Mr. John D. Williams, he said:

It is my contemptible weakness, that if I say a character smiled vacuously, I must smile vacuously; if he frowns or leers, I frown or leer; if he is a coward and given to contortions, I cringe, or twist my legs until I have to stop writing to undo the knot. I bow with him, eat with him, and gnaw my mustache with him. If the character be a lady with an exquisite laugh, I suddenly terrify you by laughing exquisitely. One reads of the astounding versatility of an actor who is stout and lean on the same evening, but what is he to the novelist who is a dozen persons within the hour? Morally, I fear, we must deteriorate; but that is a subject I may wisely edge away from.

Now this method, so delightfully described in the above conversation, is similar to the method used by the founder of modern French dramatic realism, Henry Becque. While he was writing his masterpiece, *Les Corbeaux*, in which every person has an almost intolerable air of reality, the author would rise, stand in front of a tall mirror, and go through an extraordinary series of gesticulations and

grimaces corresponding to the appearance of his imagined men and women.

There is no doubt that shyness—so characteristic of the literary as distinguished from the rhetorical temperament—is an immense asset to a creative artist. Being a mute in general conversation, especially in youth, having no part to play and praying to escape from, rather than to attract the general attention, the unavoidable hours spent in society, in eating, and in travel, are spent in acute observation. The capacity to observe, combined with an endless capacity for human sympathy, is evident in all Barrie's literary work.

The year 1891 was memorable, for in that year Barrie published his first famous novel, *The Little Minister*, and made his first appearance on any stage. With Mr. Marriott-Watson as collaborator, he produced a drama that had a run of exactly one day. The play was *Richard Savage*, and I wish I knew where I could lay my hands on a copy, for it would be interesting not only in itself, but for its *ex post facto* potentialities. Some twenty-two years ago, Mr. Edward Morton gave an entertaining account of it, by which we learn that it was a romantic drama of the eighteenth century, with real persons, Steele, Savage, and Jacob Tonson. The prologue was written by W. E. Henley, and the scenes that followed were filled with plots and counterplots, strange oaths and the clashing of swords. Mr. Morton says that the future dramatist is revealed "in the scene in which Steele frees two lovers from an irksome engagement to marry, from which both are eager to be released, and leaves each disposed to think the other has been called upon to make a sacrifice." This situation, I may add, Barrie repeated in *Walker, London*.

One would think that the prodigious success of *The Little Minister* and the failure of *Richard Savage* would indicate to the author his true "line." But Barrie, encouraged by success, was inspired by failure, for in the same year he produced two other plays of no importance, *Ibsen's Ghost* and *Becky Sharp*. The former was an unsuccessful parody on Ibsen, the preliminary necessary study of the Scandinavian genius bearing fruit later in *The Twelve-Pound Look* and in *The Will*. The other trifle was made by arranging the language of Thackeray.

These three finger-exercises merely indicate growing facility in practice; all depend on some element outside of

the author's mind. He hitched his wagon, not to a star, but to the nearest convenient post. In 1892, however, he wrote a purely original play, which, devoid of even a suggestion of literary value, indicated mastery of the playwright's art. This is *Walker, London*, produced at Toole's Theatre, London, on February 25, 1892. The entire action takes place on a houseboat on the Thames, and the humor—it is pure farce—arises from a case of mistaken identity.

The next year, with Conan Doyle as partner, he wrote *Jane Annie; or the Good Conduct Prize*, in which the small boy Caddie was the chief character and made the success of the piece.

After four years of faithful effort, he produced in 1895 *The Professor's Love Story*, his first successful play, which was revived in London in the season of 1916-1917. This has always been a favorite of its author's, not merely for the charm of sentiment in it, but because it gave him public recognition as a dramatist.

In the year 1897 his fame as a playwright equalled his fame as a novelist—and the same book is responsible for this right and left shot, *The Little Minister*. It was the fashion at that time to turn "best sellers" into plays, a fashion that began with *Trilby* and *The Prisoner of Zenda*, and continued until everyone wearied of it. Nearly all of these dramatized novels were grotesquely inept, and perhaps Mr. Barrie was led to make his attempt in order to show how it ought to be done. "If the public will insist on having their favorite fiction-characters incarnate, let us have the process artistic." The author did not hesitate to alter many details, for he was forced to change time-exposures into snap-shots. The play is even better than the book—each person is sharply individualized, and by a word or a look both character and biography are revealed. Jean is walking to church, and on being accosted, almost intones the following: "I can neither hear nor see. I am wearing my best alpaca."

The enormous success of *The Little Minister* was followed by sixteen years, during which Barrie's career as a dramatist was identified in the popular mind with the clever remodelling of one sensational novel. In 1900 appeared the sequel to *Sentimental Tommy*, called *Tommy and Grizel*, which is perhaps as good as most sequels. *Sentimental Tommy* gave evidence of inspiration. *Tommy and*

*Grizel* of perspiration. After he had cleansed his bosom of this perilous stuff, he made the year 1903 memorable by producing three original plays, *Little Mary*, a farce; *Quality Street*, a light comedy; *The Admirable Crichton*, the greatest English drama of modern times.

I doubt if we shall ever penetrate to the last significance, to the final essence, of this play. Every time I read it there is a new revelation, with a hint of something vastly important not plainly shown. Its philosophy contains a disturbing challenge to the audience, as every good drama should do. Instead of a manufactured puzzle with a trick solution — a common notion of what plays should be — it leaves the spectators unsatisfied. Instead of merely drawing our attention to the characters in the story, it directs imperiously our attention to the structure of society, to life itself. Call it unreal, call it fantastical, if you like; its scenery may be romantic, but its thought is realistic. It is founded on the basal traits in human nature, and on the history of the development of human society. Crichton is a pragmatist; the Truth is that power, not ourselves, which works for efficiency. Nature is his goddess, and the natural life in London may be exactly contrary to the natural life on a desert island. He believes in the only true form of democracy — not the nose-counting method, but a system of representative government, where the best men are chosen not as the agents of the majority that elected them, but as free-minded rulers, who will use their own judgment for the best interests of those less fitted to assume responsibility.

Crichton is a born aristocrat like every superman. His disgust at the counterfeit radicalism of Lord Loam in the early scenes, where an unnatural tea party once a month is forced on the unwilling household above and below stairs, is the natural antagonism of a man who rules below as his Lordship rules above. As soon as the conventions of society disappear before the importunate necessities of nature, we find Crichton not only ruling, but surrounding himself with all the outward signs of majesty, even as the First Consul became the Emperor.

In a very wise book we are told that among those things for which the earth is disquieted, and which it cannot bear, is a servant when he reigneth. The earth presumably means organized society. Many instances of the failure of this experiment occurred in the early days of both the French



and the Russian revolutions, but when by a single accident, the centuries of human development are swept away, and the complexities of life are transformed into a simple question of existence, service and peerage are seen to be external professions merely, as external as Piccadilly garments; the strongest man comes to the top. It is notable that on the island was only one book; that book was brought there by Crichton, and the dramatist repaid the kindness of the poet who wrote a prologue for his first play, by making this book a volume of Henley's poems.

It is clear that the play is a tragedy, not only for Crichton, but for Lady Mary — yes, perhaps for Lord Loam, when the change from open air, exercise, simple food, to their opposites, brings on some horrible disease of the liver. For the very organization of society, necessary though it be, is contrary to the natural instincts of man. You cannot have your cake and eat it, too, which so many grown-up children are forever trying to accomplish. If it is pleasant to have well-heated-and-lighted houses, opportunities for learning and for pleasure, adequate police protection, so it is decidedly unpleasant to conform every day and every night to the artificial restraints of convention. There is a price for everything and that price must be paid. Crichton knew well enough that it was better for Lady Mary to live in London than on the island, and that in London a reigning servant would be unendurable. Their natural instincts therefore had to be crucified, as natural instincts are every day and everywhere. Remember the stress laid on the word "natural" throughout the play — it is Crichton's touchstone for truth. Their parting is tragic in the extreme. All parting of lovers is tragic. And the reason why this comedy is a tragedy is not because either Crichton or Lady Mary falters at the essential moment, but because the conditions of life make their mutual happiness impossible. They may eventually attain happiness in separation, but never together. The sharp pain of the unspoken farewell may eventually become the fragrance of rosemary. But now these predestined natural lovers part, and awake from a beautiful dream to cold facts.

If we may judge by the newspaper criticism of the London revival of 1919 — which, of course, was immensely successful, for people forget how good Barrie is till they hear him again — a slightly different ending was provided to

the play. I cannot help doubting this; but if it be true, what were Barrie's reasons? Was it a sop to vociferous democracy, or was it a result of the war, which in real life would have provided another conclusion? For during the war Crichton certainly came to the front, in every sense of that word. Anyhow, if it were changed by the author, we may for once, permissibly doubt his wisdom. The ending in the book is perfect.

*Lady Mary.* Tell me one thing; you have not lost your courage?  
*Crichton.* No, my lady.  
*(She goes. He turns out the lights.)*

The dramatic critic, A. B. Walkley, protested in *The Times* against changing the flawless close. But either his recollection of the first performance played him false, or else Barrie omitted — as he did elsewhere — some spoken lines when he put the play into the permanent form of print. Mr. Walkley, in his review of the revival, says of Crichton: "He left you with the announcement of his intention of settling down with Tweeny in a little 'pub' in the Harrow Road. This struck the perfect note, the final word of irony." Now in the book, there is no mention of a "pub," nor indeed of any future plan, although of course everyone foresees the marriage of Crichton with the adoring Tweeny. Mr. Walkley continues:

You don't need to be reminded of the superman. You could do that for yourself. But now the author insists upon superfluously reminding you. The Harrow Road "pub" has been dropped out. Crichton glares at his old island subjects, and they cower with reminiscence. He glares at the formidable Lady Brocklehurst, and she, even she, quails. Lady Mary reminds him of the past, and even a *redintegratio amoris* is hinted at. In short, the author "hedges" — "hedges" against his own old irony, that perfect thing.

The book was printed long after the first stage success, and before the revival criticised by Mr. Walkley. Is it not possible that the revival follows the text, and that either the actors gave a false interpretation, or that the critic missed even more than the "pub"? Let us hope so.

In the cinema version provided for American consumption, I feared that in a land which loves to hear the scream of the eagle, the play would end with the marriage of Lady Mary and Crichton. That error was not committed; in order to explain to the spectators, always eager for sentiment, the impossibility of this union, a lady was introduced who



had married her chauffeur, with disastrous results. "You see, dear friends, it simply won't do." The final scene takes us to a distant farm in America—where Crichton and Tweeny live happily forever after. This is not a bad guess at what might easily be the sequel to Barrie's play. Back to the land—for a wide western farm is the nearest approach to the conditions of an island.

The film play unfortunately suffered under the Biblical title *Male and Female*—which for that matter might be the title of nine-tenths of the moving pictures—and was marred in the opening scenes by some gratuitous and inexcusable vulgarity. After that the play progressed extremely well; the pictures were admirable, and the story dramatically and skilfully presented. Many have felt that "a protest ought to be made" against putting Barrie on the screen. Personally, under present conditions, I rejoice that it was done, and I hope to see *Peter Pan* and other masterpieces. If we had a repertory company in every town, with the right to produce these plays on the legitimate stage, then it would be unfortunate to present them only in pictures, but, as this drama itself teaches us, the natural instinct of healthy Americans to see good plays is thwarted by a system of theatrical monopoly, and it is better to see Barrie on the screen than not to see him at all. And it is better to see Barrie on the screen than to see almost anything else.

In the year 1904 came *Peter Pan*, and it had a *succès fou*. This is no spring flower, or hothouse plant; it is a hardy perennial, and will delight thousands of spectators after we shall have all made our exit from the planet. It is one of the most profound, original, and universal plays of our epoch. No London Christmas would be complete without it. It is just as appealing in 1920 as it was in 1904, and there is no reason why it should not produce the same effect in 2020. It is the rapture of children, the joy of old age; and it ought to take its place with *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *The Pied Piper Story*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and other classics founded on some eternal principle of youth.

At all events, in this play, Barrie created a character, a personality; Peter Pan is an addition to literature and an addition to humanity. He is a real person—already proverbial—and it seems incredible that he can ever be forgotten.

It is curious that there should have ever been any doubt

as to the audience's reception of the question—*Do you believe in fairies?* Audiences will always respond to an appeal to what is best in them. This question and answer united stage and auditorium, and made every listener present an integral part of the play.

In *Alice-Sit-by-the-Fire*, not only is every individual character laughed at, but boyhood, girlhood, youth, manhood and womanhood are all enveloped in a sea of mirth. It is a comedy of situation very close to farce; its conventional feature is the complete misunderstanding among the actors, with the audience, in full possession of the truth, enjoying it all. There are times indeed when we feel the intrusion of the regular formula for producing laughter—bewilderment. Yet although it is perhaps the least important of its author's mature work, it is saved from cheapness by its revelations of human nature and by its tenderness. One expects the brother and sister to be absurd; their absurdity helps to make them irresistible; "for aye" is as delightful as "methinks" in *Sentimental Tommy*; but how about Stephen? Are full-grown men so vain as that, so easily made idiotic by gross flattery? They are.

In *Rosalind*, we have a picture of the young Oxford man who is not only the perfect type of the English undergraduate, but with the change of a few words, will represent with equal clearness the type so easily recognized at Yale, Harvard and Princeton. This introduction is an admirable illustration of the author's powers of satire, so different in their quality from the tone of his friend Bernard Shaw. The young man, to use Browning's phrase, is "empty and fine as a swordless sheath," but he is satirized by sympathy, not by scorn. Barrie, looking on the young man, loved him. One feels sure, ten years hence, the boy will be doing a man's work in the world.

For sheer audacity, it would be difficult to parallel the opening of *What Every Woman Knows* (1908). The curtain rises and not a word is spoken for seven minutes. To conceive and to insist on such a situation is an indication of how much confidence the playwright had in himself, and in his audience. His confidence was justified, though it would be foolhardy for another to imitate it.

In the beginning of this play, one sees that the author's silences are as impressive as his dialogue—in fact, it is dialogue, a kind of song without words. Silence is used for

comedy, as Maeterlinck used it for tragedy. The two men at the dambrod, the alternation of triumph and despair, were greeted by the audience with every indication of joyful recognition; and at the pat moment, in walks David, and removes his boots. You can hear the clock ticking, and when the silence is finally broken by David's voice, not one guess in a million would have predicted what the granite-like Scot would say—it is a quotation from Tennyson's *Maud*!

This is one of the masterpieces, in the same class with *The Admirable Crichton* and *Dear Brutus*. The construction of the piece is as near perfection as the human mind can make it; the unexpected happens in every scene, just as it does in history. The surface caprices and quiddities of human nature are all accurately charted, and the depths of passion—love, jealousy, ambition—are revealed. If the dramatist had written only this play, we should know that he was a man of genius. No amount of toil can turn out work like this; it is sheer revelation; it is, as Turgenev wrote to Tolstoi, a gift coming from that source whence come all things.

I think the critic of the Literary Supplement of the *London Times* is mistaken in finding this play cruel and depressing; "we are shut up in a cage of makeshift, of a clear-sighted, tolerant despair." He finds a "clear cruelty, a strong hint of sneering." A play where a lost soul is redeemed by the laughter of love, a play where love triumphs over the forces of evil can hardly be characterized in such terms. Tragedy is there in plenty; but a woman's wit puts it to flight.

It is possible that if Ibsen had never written *A Doll's House*, Barrie would not have written *The Twelve Pound Look* (1910). It certainly harks back to the great Norwegian, only there is an improvement even on that master of economy, for the whole story is squeezed (as Henry James would have said) into one act. It has the depth of Ibsen without his grimness, and a whole life history is revealed in fifteen minutes. It is the tragedy of failure in success; the husband, identified by Barrie with every man in the audience, had a complacency that literally made his lawful spouse run for her life. There was not the faintest spark of an adventure about such a domestic existence—

We have not sighed deep, laughed free,  
Starved, feasted, despaired,—been happy.

Nora slammed the door, in order that the audience might hear it; and she did this at the last moment of the play. Kate slipped out quietly many years before the rise of the curtain; and her subsequent adventures, together with the slow poisoning of her successor, form a sequel to *The Doll's House*. The combination of Ibsen and Barrie (at their best) is a delight to gods and men.

A reason why Barrie wrote it in one act, is because he could not bear to have the logical sequence interrupted. I have often wished at good plays that there might be no intermissions. Who wants to leave the room at an exciting moment? These between-the-acts are as acute a nuisance as the persons who stood between the sunshine and Diogenes.

In 1913 appeared *The Legend of Leonora*, not the greatest but in some ways the most original of all its author's productions. This is one of my favourite plays, although it was coldly received by both English and American critics. To omit this comedy from Barrie's works would be a visible subtraction; it is unlike any of the others both in the humour of character and in the humour of situation. Instead of dramatizing action and conversation, he has dramatized *motives and impulses*—which in organized society cannot possibly come to fruition.

In *The Legend of Leonora*, we have two ideas presented; one, that no individual can be described by a formula; on different days in the life of the same person, that person may behave as irregularly and inconsistently as the weather.

The second idea, on which the comedy is really founded, is the dramatisation of *impulse* instead of the representation of action. Leonora's little girl had a cold, just a snuffly cold; and when the lady requested the gentleman to close the train-window, and he rudely refused, she killed him. So far from attempting to excuse herself, or to pretend that it was an accident, she insists that she meant to kill him, and is glad she did. "Can't you understand? My little girl had a cold and the man wouldn't shut the window." It is not she who is crazy, but everyone else! Now of course a woman travelling with a sick child would not kill a man who refused to shut a window; but she would want to. The same dramatisation of motive and impulse appears in the trial

scene. One critic showed a misconception of this, saying that he thought it a poor burlesque. It is not a burlesque at all. The prisoner is beautiful, centripetally attractive; the judge, the prosecuting attorney, the jury show her every attention, vying with one another in claiming her notice; when the jury retire, they soon send in a message, requesting the prisoner's company during their deliberations. Now none of these things could possibly happen in a court of law; the judge and prosecuting attorney would not flatter the prisoner, nor would the jury request her presence; but if the prisoner were radiantly beautiful, this is exactly what every man of them would want to do. She gladly accedes to the wish of the jury and enters their room carrying an enormous bouquet; when she returns, she has almost nothing of it left; but when the jury appear, everyone of them has a flower in his buttonhole.

Human nature may be faithfully and truthfully represented in unnatural speech and in unnatural conduct, and this is what Barrie has done. Such at all events is my understanding of the play, as I give it remembering the happy day I saw it on the stage. I eagerly await its appearance in print, whether or not my impression will be confirmed.

In *A Kiss for Cinderella* (1916) we have one of the lesser plays, but for all that a thing of beauty. Here he returns to favourite ground, representing life through the imagination of an elementary mind. The old charwoman attends the royal function, where the king and queen are sitting in rocking-chairs and eating ice-cream cones. Lord Times is even higher, as the Quiet was above Setebos. This play indicates that the tenderness in the author's heart cannot be killed by circumstances; in the scene where the charwoman is taking care of the babies, one of them happens to be German. "Some one had to look after it!" In her poverty and in her charity is there not a rebuke both to those who had much and gave little and to those who foamed at the mouth with indiscriminate hate?

The World War naturally appears in the dramas written between 1914 and 1918. Our author has the distinction of having written the worst and the best war-play—I refer to *Der Tag* and to *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals*.

The greatest play produced by the war is *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals*. It is a tragedy, as every war-play should be. Just as he takes the ordinary themes of the the-

atre in times of peace, and creates something permanent and beautiful, so he takes the universal theme of the war, and shows how its tragedy reaches down into the humblest lives. No Oxford or Cambridge here; we have only charwomen, who preserve social distinctions with more rigidity than prevails in Mayfair. (A favourite theme with Barrie; remember Crichton below stairs. The last persons who will ever accept democracy are the servants.) "Altogether, she is of a very different social status from one who, like Mrs. Haggerty, is a charwoman but nothing else." The entire play takes place under ground, like Gorki's *Night Asylum*, which in other respects it does not resemble! We shall see that the basement will be illuminated by Love, like that wonderful subterranean home of Tolstoi's shoemaker.

Four of them are having tea, with Mrs. Dowey as hostess. "There is no intention on their part to consider peace terms until a decisive victory has been gained in the field (Sarah Ann Dowey), until the Kaiser is put to the right-about (Emma Mickleham), and singing very small (Amelia Twymley)." Their pride in having sons at the front, in owning war savings certificates, in being bitter-enders, is precisely like that of their sisters in Park Lane. Across every title-page of Barrie's books might be written, "Human nature is always and everywhere the same."

Mrs. Dowey's conquest of her hypothetical son cannot possibly be described; only Barrie, with his insight born of divine sympathy, could have imagined it. The big, rough "chunk of Scotland," bursting with vitality, leaves her for the front, as his time is up; we hear him in the street; "that is he laughing coarsely with Dixon." In the last scene not a word is spoken. Kenneth has been killed. The "old lady" is in her working-clothes, about to start off for her day's toil. But before going, she shows her medals.

It is, like all Barrie's plays, like the story of every human life, a tragi-comedy. The early scenes arouse inextinguishable laughter; in the last act, the ordinary relation of audience to stage is reversed. Instead of noise on the stage and silence in the auditorium, the solitary woman moved about in absolute stillness while unrestrained sobbing is heard all over the house.

The heroine is a charwoman, elevated to a vertiginous height by solemn pride.



The latest play to fall within the scope of this essay (how happy I am that I cannot make it complete) is *Dear Brutus*, which had its first regular American performance in New York, 23 December, 1918, and ran until the closing of the theatre in hot weather. The title of course is taken from the speech of Cassius in *Julius Caesar*:

The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,  
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.

But I think the germ of the play and its main idea are to be found in *The Admirable Crichton*, in one of the stage directions of the third act: the slacker Ernest, transformed in appearance by Crichton's discipline, appears hard at work, and here is the comment by the dramatist:

*We should say that he is Ernest completely changed if we were of those who hold that people change.*

That people do not change is the law of which this drama is a brilliant illustration and like all rules it is proved by its exceptions. All the persons of the play have, by the magical agency of Lob (see *Midsummer Night's Dream*), a second chance; and although their circumstances are different, their characters are the same. With one exception. The artist and his wife, at the close of the play, seek out a new and better existence, because they have passed through a spiritual revolution. The fault then really is in ourselves, and Barrie is true to the Shakespearean quotation. Ninety-nine out of a hundred would be the same, even if they had their heart's desire—an opportunity to try again; but there is the hundredth man. The play is disheartening when we think of the average person; but inspiring when we think of the possibilities of human nature. The one hope of the world is not that human nature will change, for it never will. The hope lies in the possibility of controlling human instincts, in the coming of that time when man's energy, conscience, reason, and will power will control his passions, rather than being their obedient servants.

Nothing could surpass, it would seem, the skill in construction shown in this comedy. But in *Dear Brutus*, as in *The Admirable Crichton*, in *What Every Woman Knows*, and in all Barrie's plays, the last act crowns the work.

WILLIAM LYON PHELPS.

## MUSIC OF THE MONTH

### A BIRTHDAY TRIBUTE TO BEETHOVEN— STRAUSS AND THE MUSIC OF DEATH

BY LAWRENCE GILMAN

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IT IS one hundred and fifty years since Ludwig von Beethoven was born, and we are all saluting the Great Wraith in memory of December 16, 1770. So let us meditate here concerning him.

Was Beethoven ever more persuasive than as a tonal celebrant of the natural world? For a giant of art, an authentic master of expression, his range was amazingly limited. He could do wondrous things with that titanic voice of his—he could be a prophet, a revealer of mysteries; and he could sing with the morning stars in their exalted hours. But he could not express the intenser phases of human emotion—his music lacks flame, lacks sensuous warmth, lacks radiance. Nor had he the power of shaking and tearing the heart through tragic speech, as it is shaken and torn in page after page of Wagner. And he was no swift-winged, iridescent fantasiste—no “bold foot along the verges of percipitous dream.”

But how moving, how immortally memorable he is as a poet of Nature! Perhaps, here, he is most lovable, most treasured. For Beethoven, the Return to Nature was no deliberately romantic sophistication. To his devout and passionate spirit, it was a resort as spontaneous and naïve and profound as the inclination of the mediæval mystic's soul toward God. He sincerely and piously believed, as we have elsewhere noted, that wisdom broods upon the hills and in the long forest aisles; that sustenance for the heart can be garnered from sunlight and free winds, and spiritual peace drunk from quiet valleys as from a divinely proffered cup. He would have understood that ecstatically confident cry of a Celtic dreamer of today: “Death will