JAMES MATTHEW BARRIE

EXTENDED ANNOTATED EDITION

ECHOES OF THE WAR

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J. M. Barrie

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James Matthew Barrie – A Personal Sketch By Hattie Tyng Griswold

IAN MACLAREN recently related the following incident, illustrating the pride of the common people of Scotland in their most popular author. He said :

" Not long ago, I was travelling from Aberdeen to Perth. A man sitting opposite studied me for a minute, and then, evidently being convinced that I had average intelligence, and could appreciate a great sight if I saw it, he said, ' If you will stand up with me at the window, I will show you something in a minute ; you will only get a glimpse suddenly and for an instant.' I stood. He said, ' Can you see that ? ' I saw some smoke, and said so. ' That 's Kirriemuir,' he answered. I sat down, and he sat opposite me, and watched my face to see that the fact that I had had a glimpse of Kirriemuir, or rather of its smoke, was one I thoroughly appreciated, and would carry in retentive memory for the rest of my life. Then I said, ' Mr. Barrie was born there.' ' Yes,' he said, ' he was ; and I was born there myself.' "

This intense loyalty to every thing Scotch, this pride in the achievements of any countryman, this appreciation of the national element in literature, is one of the most pleasing traits of the Scotch character, though it has. its humorous side, and has roused inextinguishable laughter in its day. Much as the outside world praises and prizes the best work of such men as Stevenson, Barrie, Ian MacLaren, and others, it is only people who have lived with and loved the bracken and the heather, who feel its subtlest charm. This fragrance is in every leaf of these Scottish stories, and it cannot stir the alien heart as it does that of the native.

What a classic land its writers have made of Scotland, the wild and rugged, and barren little spot ! The land touched by the pen of Scott is as classic as Greece, that connected with the life of Burns no less so, and the home and haunts of Carlyle, if loved by a lesser number, are loved just as passionately. And now we have a new Delphian vale in Thrums or Kirriemuir, and still another in Drumtochty. Time will test the fame of these new men, and prove their staying qualities, but at present they really seem to have made a high bid for continued favor, in the hearts of so steadfast a people as the Scotch.

James Matthew Barrie was born in Kirriemuir on May 9, 1860. Kirriemuir is sixty miles north of Edinburgh, and Mr. Barrie has made all the world familiar with the little secluded hamlet, by his descriptions of Thrums and its inhabitants. We know these people as we do our personal friends, and if we could but sit at the window in Thrums we could call many of their names as they pass by. Leeby and Jess, alas ! we should not see; they are asleep under the brachen and the moss on the hill overlooking Kirriemuir, and that little burgh seems thinly inhabited now that they are gone.

The day of James Barrie's birth was always remembered in his family by the fact that six hair-bottomed chairs were brought into the house upon that day, chairs which had been longed for, and waited and worked for, by that capable and ambitious woman, Margaret Ogilvie, his mother. He heard the description of the coming of the chairs so often afterwards, and shared in the toil and saving to get other things to place beside the chairs, for so long a time, that he feels as if he remembered the event for himself; and this is the case with many of the incidents of his mother's life which had been conned over so often in his hearing. From six years old he takes up the thread of memory for himself,

and sees his mother's face, and knows that God sent her into the world to open the minds of all who looked to beautiful thoughts. His life was very closely bound up with hers from this time on, and the history of the one is that of the other. What she had been and what he should be, were the great subjects between them in his boyhood, and the stories she told him, for she was a born storyteller, took such hold on his memory, and so stirred his imagination, that they afterward laid the foundations of his fame, when he published them in his first volume of " Auld Licht Idylls." Never were such friends as he and his mother all through his youth, and her mark was indelibly set upon him by that time. She had a numerous family of children, but Jamie seemed to be different to her from the others. Some peculiar mystic grace had made him only the child of his mother," and it was a worshipful love on the part of both that held them together. This mother was a great reader, and they read many books together when he was a boy, " Robinson Crusoe ' being the first. This led to his writing stories himself, and reading them to her. She was a sharp critic, and he served his apprenticeship under her. They were all tales of adventure, he tells us ; the scene lay in unknown parts, desert islands, and enchanted gardens, and there were always knights in armor riding on black chargers at full tilt. At the age of twelve he made up his mind to be an author, and she aided and abetted him in all the ways known to a loving mother's heart. About this time, or a little later, he was sent to the Dumfries Academy, where his brother was Inspector of Schools. He was a bright scholar, and very happy there, where he made unusual progress in his studies.

At eighteen years of age he entered the University at Edinburgh, and devoted himself especially to the study of literature. He went but little into the society of the place, and made but few friends among the students, being

considered " reserved." But he had opportunity for more reading than ever before, and became quite absorbed in the multitude of books to which he had access for the first time. He also began the writing of literary criticisms for the " Edinburgh Courant ' at this time. He showed a true touch even in his first writing, which may have been owing somewhat to his years of practice in the garret at home, on stories which must be made to please his mother. Carlyle, whom he had sometimes seen while at Dumfries, and who became his hero, exerted a great influence upon him at this time. He began to look upon life through the eyes of his mentor, and to value the sturdy virtues which form so large a part of his discourse. He caught some of his phrases, which were a stumbling-block to his mother, although she too was an ardent admirer of the rugged Scotchman. Sincerity, truth, courage, strength, these became his watchwords, and their influence can be seen in his writings to this day. The poetry of common life, the hardy virtues of the humble, the sweetness of the domestic life in many lowly cottages, the humorous side of petty religious controversy, these became his theme, and the world turned away from the conventional novel about Lady Arabella and Lord Vincent Vere de Vere, and the vicar and the curate, and the old family solicitor of the Tulkinghorn type, to read about " The Courting of T'nowhead's Bell." He heeded Longfellow's advice, although very likely he had never heard of it, in the verse which says,

" That is best which lieth nearest,
Shape from this thy work of art."

How many times of late we have seen the wisdom of this course exemplified ! Instead of going back to the past, or flying to the ends of the earth for some new and impossible theme, we have seen our most popular writers sitting down on their own doorsteps, and describing what actually

passed before their eyes, with the result that the whole reading world wanted to see just what they saw, and with their eyes. Miss Murfree among the Tennessee mountains, Miss Wilkins in hackneyed New England, Olive Schreiner on a South African Farm, Mr. Cable among the Creoles of Louisiana, Kipling with the British army in India, Thomas Nelson Page in the New South, Mary Hallock Foote in the Western mining-camps, and many others who have achieved late successes, have done so on their own ground, in reporting the actual life of the people with whom they were familiar. That repulsive realism which concerns itself only with disease and vice and abnormal conditions will be crowded out by the better realism of the new school. While we have among the younger writers a few who follow the lead of Ibsen and of Zola, and insist upon dragging into the light all the hidden things of life, and whose writings consequently are redolent of decay, this newer group give us novels of character, and our interest lies in its development amid the varied circumstances depicted, and not in some hidden crime or adulterous amour, which is exploited with all its disgusting details, till the revolted reader throws it into the fire, which alone can purify its poisonous pages. That our presses have teemed with this kind of books for a few years past, is a well-known fact. About them we could say as Thoreau said about certain poems of Walt Whitman,

" He does not celebrate love at all. It is as if the beasts spoke. I think that men have not been ashamed of themselves without reason. No doubt there have always been dens where such deeds were unblushingly recited, and it is no merit to compete with their inhabitants."

But in the very midst of this passing phase of the gospel of dirt, were flung such books as " A Window in Thrums " and " The Bonnie Brier Bush," and their reception proved that

the heart of the reading world is sound, although it is sometimes beguiled into the haunts of leprosy for a season.

Graduating from the University in Edinburgh in 1882, Barrie necessarily began to look at once for work, for his father had already done perhaps more than he was able to do for him, and there was a numerous family whose needs had to be considered. The famous managing of Mrs. Barrie had been put to many hard tests in its time, and her son knew too well the inner details of the home life, to wish to live a moment longer than was necessary at the expense of his parents. He tells us in one place about the little parlor which was the pride of his mother's heart:

" Every article of furniture, from the chairs that came into the world with me, and have worn so much better, though I was new and they were second-hand, to the mantel-border of fashionable design which she sewed in her seventieth year, having picked up the stitch in half a lesson, has its story of fight and attainment for her; hence her satisfaction."

The furnishing of the family wardrobe also had been with her a series of skirmishes, in which she had plucked from every well-dressed person she had chanced to see, ideas for the making or re-making of garments for one or another of the family. And she made very good imitations indeed of the clothing of the better dressed people, out of the poorer resources of her cottage. She would imitate the cut of a garment, if only she could get one long satisfying look at it, in a manner that would have been the envy of some famous dressmakers. And as to patterns and colors her taste was perfect. Her son dwells lovingly on all these details, in his memorial of her, which is in part a history of his own life, so interwoven were their existences. He made what haste he could to earn money for himself and her. For the greatest of

his pleasures in the earning came to be what he could do for her to gratify her innocent pride and her generous impulses toward others. At this time his sister saw an advertisement for a leader-writer by the Nottingham " Daily Journal," and with great trepidation and excitement the family awaited the result of his application for the place. Great was the rejoicing when he received the appointment, at what seemed to them the magnificent salary of three guineas a week. For this sum he was to write an article, and notes on political and social topics every day. This journalistic training was doubtless of great value to him, and he describes it somewhat in a novel written some years afterward, called " When a Man 's Single." In it he narrates how the young man, who had accepted a place on the paper, first appeared at the office of the " Daily Mirror." He says:

" During the time the boy took to light Mr. Licquarish's fire, a young man in a heavy overcoat knocked more than once at the door in the alley, and then moved off as if somewhat relieved that there was no response. He walked round and round the block of buildings, gazing upward at the windows of the composing-room ; and several times he ran against other pedestrians, on whom he turned fiercely, and would then have begged their pardons had he known what to say. Frequently he felt in his pocket to see if his money was still there, and once he went behind a door and counted it. There were three pounds seventeen shillings altogether, and he kept it in a linen bag that had been originally made for carrying worms when he went fishing. . . . Rob had stopped at the door a score of times and then turned away. He had arrived in Silchester in the afternoon, and come straight to the ' Mirror ' office to look at it. Then he had set out in quest of lodgings, and having got them, had returned to the passage. He was not naturally a man crushed by a sense of his own unworthiness, but looking up at these

windows and at the shadows that passed them every moment, he felt far away from his saw-mill. What a romance to him, too, was in the glare of the gas, and in the ' Mirror ' bill that was being reduced to pulp on the wall at the mouth of the close ! It had begun to rain heavily, but he did not feel the want of an umbrella, never having possessed one in Thrums."

The new reporter finally made his way in, and was introduced by the editor to the reporters' room, where the following conversation took place :

" ' What do you think of George Frederick (the editor) ? ' asked the chief, after he had pointed out to Rob the only chair that such a stalwart reporter might safely sit on. ' He was very pleasant,' said Rob. 'Yes,' said Billy Kirker, thoughtfully, ' there 's nothing George Frederick wouldn't do for any one if it could be done gratis.' ' And he struck me as an enterprising man.' ' Enterprise without outlay, is the motto of this office,' said the chief. 'But the paper seems to be well conducted,' said Rob, a little crestfallen. 'The worst conducted in England,' said Kirker, cheerfully. Rob asked how the ' Mirror ' compared with the ' Argus.' ' They have six reporters to our three,' said Kirker, ' but we do double work and beat them.' ' I suppose there is a great deal of rivalry between the staffs of the two papers ? ' Rob asked, for he had read of such things. ' Oh, no,' said Kirker, ' we help each other. For instance, if Daddy Welsh, the " Argus " chief, is drunk, I help him ; and if I 'm drunk, he helps me.' "

This initiatory conversation was closed by Kirker asking Rob to lend him five bob, and after that Rob took two books, which had been handed him for review, arid made his way to his lodgings. He sat up far into the night reading one of the books, " The Scorn of Scorns," and writing a

murderous review of it, and upon the effect of that review hangs the rest of the story.

However literal this description of his first adventures as a journalist may or may not be, there he was, at last, engaged in the profession of literature. No prouder or happier man walked the earth. He remained in Nottingham about two years, and during that time he began sending articles to various London publications. The first paper to accept any of these contributions was the " Pall Mall Gazette." But others were accepted after a while, and the young man began to think seriously of leaving his position in Nottingham and going up to London. The great city was calling to him, as it calls to so many young men of talent and ambition every year. He began to hear his days before him, and the music of his life. He was

" Yearning for the large excitement which the coming years would yield,
Eager-hearted as a boy when first he leaves his father's field."

And it was not long after he began hearing the voices, before he " saw the lights of London flaring in the dreary dawn." The " St. James Gazette " accepting a couple of articles was the decisive event with him. After that he concluded to make the rash venture, although his mother gave way to her fears, and protested earnestly against it, fearing he would have to sleep in the parks, and be robbed or murdered whatever way he might turn. Mr. Barrie says :

" While I was away at college she drained all available libraries for books about those who go to London to live by the pen, and they all told the same shuddering tale. London, which she never saw, was to her a monster that licked up country youths as they stepped from the train ;

there were the garrets in which they sat abject, and the park seats where they passed the night. Those park seats were the monster's glaring eyes to her, and as I go by them now she is nearer to me than when I am in any other part of London. I dare say that when night comes, this Hyde Park, which is so gay by day, is haunted by the ghosts of many mothers, who run, wild-eyed, from seat to seat looking for their sons. ..." If you could only be sure of as much as would keep body and soul together,' my mother would say with a sigh. 'With something over to send to you.' ' You couldn't expect that at the start.' "

He says further of this time :

"In an old book I find columns of notes about works projected at this time, nearly all to consist of essays on deeply uninteresting subjects ; the lightest was to be a volume on the older satirists, beginning with Skelton and Tom Nash the half of that manuscript still lies in a dusty chest. The only story was one about Mary Queen of Scots, who was also the subject of many unwritten papers. Queen Mary seems to have been luring me to my undoing ever since I saw Holyrood, and I have a horrid fear that I may write that novel yet. That anything could be written about my native place never struck me."

The " St. James Gazette " continued to take his articles after he went up to London, though the editor had advised him not to come, and he began writing his " Auld Licht Idylls." The first book which he put forth was a satire on London life, called "Better Dead," which was not a success. But his newspaper articles had begun to attract attention, and by the time " Auld Licht Idylls ' appeared, he had achieved a reputation, at least a local one. This book had an immediate success, and ran rapidly through several editions. His mother had been an Auld Licht in her youth.

They were a very small but fierce sect who had seceded from the Presbyterian church, and maintained themselves in isolation from all other Christians for some time. Mrs. Barrie, knowing them from the inside, could tell all sorts of quaint and marvellous tales about them, whose humor was sure to please. It was from her stories that the Idylls were mainly drawn, so she was in a sense a collaborator with her son in their production. But she had no faith in them as literature, and considered an editor who would publish them as " rather soft." When she read the first one she was quite alarmed, and, fearing the talk of the town, hid the paper from all eyes. While her son thought of her as showing them proudly to all their friends, she was concealing them fearfully in a bandbox on the garret stair. It amused her greatly, from that time on, that the editors preferred the Auld Licht articles to any others, and she racked her brain constantly for new details. Once she said to her son : " I was fifteen when I got my first pair of elastic-sided boots. Tell the editor that my charge for this important news is two pounds ten." And she made brave fun of those easily fooled editors day after day. The publishers were very shy of the book when it was offered to them, and it went the round of their offices before it found a purchaser. But at last a firm sufficiently daring was found by a good friend, an editor, and Mrs. Barrie had the great satisfaction of seeing her son's name really on a book-cover, and in knowing in her inmost heart that the book was largely her own, though that she would never admit, even in the home circle.

When the next book was ready, there was no looking for a publisher, all were eager now to use his material. A few months only elapsed before the second successful book was published. It had run serially through a weekly paper, and was republished from that. It was called " When a Man 's Single," and embodied some of his journalistic experiences,

as has been told. In rapid succession came " A Window in Thrums," " My Lady Nicotine," and " The Little Minister." In the first-named he went back to his childhood's home, and gave pictures of the life in it and in the village, with his mother and sister for two of its leading characters. He opens it with a description of the House on the Brae :

" On the bump of green ground which the brae twists, at the top of the brae, and within cry of T'nowhead Farm, still stands a one-story house, whose whitewashed walls, streaked with the discoloration that rain leaves, look yellow when the snow comes. In the old days the stiff ascent left Thrums behind, and where is now the making of a suburb was only a poor row of dwellings and a manse, with Hendry's house to watch the brae. The house stood bare, without a shrub, in a garden whose paling did not go all the way round, the potato pit being only kept out of the road, that here sets off southward, by a broken dyke of stones and earth. On each side of the slate-colored door was a window of knotted glass. Ropes were flung over the thatch to keep the roof on in wind.

" Into this humble abode I would take any one who cares to accompany me. But you must not come in a contemptuous mood, thinking that the poor are but a stage removed from beasts of burden, as some cruel writers of these days say ; nor will I have you turn over with your foot the shabby horse-hair chairs that Leeby kept so speckless, and Hendry weaved for years to buy, and Jess so loved to look on."

The window at Thrums was that of Jess :

" For more than twenty years she had not been able to go so far as the door, and only once while I knew her was she ben in the room. With her husband, Hendry, and her only daughter, Leeby, to lean upon, and her hand clutching her