JAMES MATTHEW BARRIE

EXTENDED ANNOTATED EDITION

MY BEST PLAYS

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James Matthew 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 staff, she took twice a day, when she was strong, the journey between her bed and the window where stood her chair."

Again he writes :

" Ah, that brae ! The history of tragic little Thrums is sunk into it like the stones it swallowed in winter. We have all found the brae long and steep in the spring of life. Do you remember how the child you once were sat at the foot of it and wondered if a new world began at the top ? It climbs from a shallow burn, and we used to sit on the brig a long time before venturing to climb. As boys,' we ran up the brae. As men and women, young and in our prime, we almost forgot that it was there. But the autumn of life comes, and the brae grows steeper ; then the winter, and

once again we are as the child, pausing apprehensively on the brig. Yet we are no longer the child ; we look now for no new world at the top, only for a little garden, and a tiny house, and a hand loom in the house. It is only a garden of kail and potatoes, but there may be a line of daisies, white and red, on each side of the narrow footpath, and honeysuckle over the door. Life is not always hard, even after backs grow bent, and we know that all braes lead only to the grave."

It was the plainest and simplest of books, all about a handful of peasants who spoke in broad Scotch, which many times the reader did not fully understand, but it caught the eye of the world, and it went to its heart. It was the literary success of the year, and Margaret Ogilvie should have been satisfied. But there was a thorn in her side, and that was the name of Robert Louis Stevenson. She had great fear that he was still considered the superior of her Jamie. At first she refused to read a word he had written, deriding him every time his name was mentioned. Then, her curiosity getting the better of her prejudice, she read him secretly, to convince herself of her son's superiority, but not getting great comfort from the experiment. Then she scoffed more than ever at "that Stevenson man," and tossed her head, and her soft tender face became hard. " I could never thole his books," she would say vindictively. But at last she was caught in the act of reading " The Master of Ballantrae ' by her son, who peeped through the keyhole, and " muttering the music to herself, nodding her head in approval, and taking a stealthy glance at the foot of each page before she began at the top." But that was nothing to the enchantment which " Treasure Island " had for her, when once she had opened its fascinating pages. They had not dared to laugh at her, for fear she would give up her pleasure entirely, and so it was understood in the family that she only read him to

make sure of his unworthiness. But the night when she became so absorbed in it that she did not know when bedtime came, and they remonstrated with her, and coaxed her to give it up and go to bed, she exclaimed quite passionately, " I dinna lay my head on a pillow this night till I see how that laddie got out of the barrel; ' and the secret was told, and they knew that Stevenson had conquered his last enemy. But never in words did she admit it. To the last she disliked to see letters come to her son with the Vailima postmark on them.

" The Little Minister " came as a revelation of Mr. Barrie's sustained power, to many people who had read his sketches. It is probably his finest piece of work thus far. Its success was overwhelming ; many people were fascinated with it who cared little for his first efforts. One must be something of a humorist himself to thoroughly appreciate his earlier work, and all readers are not endowed with that quality. But most readers enjoyed the new story, and its author became the drawing card in periodical literature. Suddenly in the midst of his fame, and a young man's delight in it, he left London and went back to Kirriemuir to remain. The long invalidism of his mother had taken on dangerous symptoms, and the faithful daughter, who had no breath, no being, but in hers, could not care for her alone, for she was herself smitten with a lingering but fatal disease. For a long time the two faithful watchers tended the dying mother, doing everything themselves, for she would not allow any one else even to touch her, and at last the worn-out daughter --as her brother describes it " died on foot," three days before the mother. They were buried together, on her seventy-sixth-birthday. Her son writes : " I think God was smiling when He took her to Him, as He had so often smiled at her during those seventy-six years."

Mr. Barrie continued to live on at Viewmount House, the little villa built in recent years on the outskirts of Kirriemuir. It was there that he was married, in 1894, to Miss Mary Ansell, an English girl, and really began life for himself, at the age of thirty-four. His last novel, " Sentimental Tommy," deals largely with the boyhood of the hero, and the scene is laid in London and in Thrums alternately. Whether that locality will serve much longer as literary material is a question which readers will answer differently, according to whether they really belong to the Barrie cult or not. On those who worship at the inner shrine it never palls, but the general reader may perhaps complain of monotony, and yearn for a new setting for the coming tales.

His work " Margaret Ogilvie," is a memorial of his mother from which we have quoted largely in this article.

THE ADMIRABLE CRICHTON

ACT I. AT LOAM HOUSE, MAYFAIR

A moment before the curtain rises, the Hon. Ernest Woolley drives up to the door of Loam House in Mayfair. There is a happy smile on his pleasant, insignificant face, and this presumably means that he is thinking of himself. He is too busy over nothing, this man about town, to be always thinking of himself, but, on the other hand, he almost never thinks of any other person. Probably Ernest's great moment is when he wakes of a morning and realises that he really is Ernest, for we must all wish to be that which is our ideal.

We can conceive him springing out of bed light-heartedly and waiting for his man to do the rest. He is dressed in excellent taste, with just the little bit more which shows that he is not without a sense of humour: the dandiacal are often saved by carrying a smile at the whole thing in their spats, let us say. Ernest left Cambridge the other day, a member of The Athenaeum (which he would be sorry to have you confound with a club in London of the same name). He is a bachelor, but not of arts, no mean epigrammatist (as you shall see), and a favourite of the ladies. He is almost a celebrity in restaurants, where he dines frequently, returning to sup; and during this last year he has probably paid as much in them for the privilege of handing his hat to an attendant as the rent of a working-man's flat. He complains brightly that he is hard up, and that if somebody or other at Westminster does not look out the country will go to the dogs. He is no fool. He has the shrewdness to float with the current because it is a labour-saving process, but he has sufficient pluck to fight, if fight he must (a brief contest, for he would soon be toppled over). He has a light nature, which would enable him to bob up cheerily in new conditions and return unaltered to the old ones. His selfishness is his most endearing quality. If he has his way he will spend his life like a cat in pushing his betters out of the soft places, and until he is old he will be fondled in the process.

He gives his hat to one footman and his cane to another, and mounts the great staircase unassisted and undirected. As a nephew of the house he need show no credentials even to Crichton, who is guarding a door above.

It would not be good taste to describe Crichton, who is only a servant; if to the scandal of all good houses he is to stand out as a figure in the play, he must do it on his own, as they say in the pantry and the boudoir.

We are not going to help him. We have had misgivings ever since we found his name in the title, and we shall keep him out of his rights as long as we can. Even though we softened to him he would not be a hero in these clothes of servitude; and he loves his clothes. How to get him out of them? It would require a cataclysm. To be an indoor servant at all is to Crichton a badge of honour; to be a butler at thirty is the realisation of his proudest ambitions. He is devotedly attached to his master, who, in his opinion, has but one fault, he is not sufficiently contemptuous of his inferiors. We are immediately to be introduced to this solitary failing of a great English peer.

This perfect butler, then, opens a door, and ushers Ernest into a certain room. At the same moment the curtain rises on this room, and the play begins.

It is one of several reception-rooms in Loam House, not the most magnificent but quite the softest; and of a warm afternoon all that those who are anybody crave for is the softest. The larger rooms are magnificent and bare, carpetless, so that it is an accomplishment to keep one's feet on them; they are sometimes lent for charitable purposes; they are also all in use on the night of a dinner-party, when you may find yourself alone in one, having taken a wrong turning; or alone, save for two others who are within hailing distance.

This room, however, is comparatively small and very soft. There are so many cushions in it that you wonder why, if you are an outsider and don't know that, it needs six cushions to make one fair head comfy. The couches themselves are cushions as large as beds, and there is an art of sinking into them and of waiting to be helped out of them. There are several famous paintings on the walls, of

which you may say 'Jolly thing that,' without losing caste as knowing too much; and in cases there are glorious miniatures, but the daughters of the house cannot tell you of whom; 'there is a catalogue somewhere.' There are a thousand or so of roses in basins, several library novels, and a row of weekly illustrated newspapers lying against each other like fallen soldiers. If any one disturbs this row Crichton seems to know of it from afar and appears noiselessly and replaces the wanderer. One thing unexpected in such a room is a great array of tea things. Ernest spots them with a twinkle, and has his epigram at once unsheathed. He dallies, however, before delivering the thrust.

ERNEST. I perceive, from the tea cups, Crichton, that the great function is to take place here.

CRICHTON (with a respectful sigh). Yes, sir.

ERNEST (chuckling heartlessly). The servants' hall coming up to have tea in the drawing-room! (With terrible sarcasm.) No wonder you look happy, Crichton.

CRICHTON (under the knife). No, sir.

ERNEST. Do you know, Crichton, I think that with an effort you might look even happier. (CRICHTON smiles wanly.) You don't approve of his lordship's compelling his servants to be his equals—once a month?

CRICHTON. It is not for me, sir, to disapprove of his lordship's radical views.

ERNEST. Certainly not. And, after all, it is only once a month that he is affable to you.

CRICHTON. On all other days of the month, sir, his lordship's treatment of us is everything that could be desired.

ERNEST. (This is the epigram.) Tea cups! Life, Crichton, is like a cup of tea; the more heartily we drink, the sooner we reach the dregs.

CRICHTON (obediently). Thank you, sir.

ERNEST (becoming confidential, as we do when we have need of an ally). Crichton, in case I should be asked to say a few words to the servants, I have strung together a little speech. (His hand strays to his pocket.) I was wondering where I should stand.

(He tries various places and postures, and comes to rest leaning over a high chair, whence, in dumb show, he addresses a gathering. CRICHTON, with the best intentions, gives him a footstool to stand on, and departs, happily unconscious that ERNEST in some dudgeon has kicked the footstool across the room.)

ERNEST (addressing an imaginary audience, and desirous of startling them at once). Suppose you were all little fishes at the bottom of the sea—

(He is not quite satisfied with his position, though sure that the fault must lie with the chair for being too high, not with him for being too short. CRICHTON'S suggestion was not perhaps a bad one after all. He lifts the stool, but hastily conceals it behind him on the entrance of the LADIES CATHERINE and AGATHA, two daughters of the house. CATHERINE is twenty, and AGATHA two years younger. They are very fashionable young women indeed, who might

wake up for a dance, but they are very lazy, CATHERINE being two years lazier than AGATHA.)

ERNEST (uneasily jocular, because he is concealing the footstool). And how are my little friends to-day?

AGATHA (contriving to reach a settee). Don't be silly, Ernest. If you want to know how we are, we are dead. Even to think of entertaining the servants is so exhausting.

CATHERINE (subsiding nearer the door). Besides which, we have had to decide what frocks to take with us on the yacht, and that is such a mental strain.

ERNEST. You poor over-worked things. (Evidently AGATHA is his favourite, for he helps her to put her feet on the settee, while CATHERINE has to dispose of her own feet.) Rest your weary limbs.

CATHERINE (perhaps in revenge). But why have you a footstool in your hand?

AGATHA. Yes?

ERNEST. Why? (Brilliantly; but to be sure he has had time to think it out.) You see, as the servants are to be the guests I must be butler. I was practising. This is a tray, observe.

(Holding the footstool as a tray, he minces across the room like an accomplished footman. The gods favour him, for just here LADY MARY enters, and he holds out the footstool to her.)

Tea, my lady?

(LADY MARY is a beautiful creature of twenty-two, and is of a natural hauteur which is at once the fury and the envy of her sisters. If she chooses she can make you seem so insignificant that you feel you might be swept away with the crumb-brush. She seldom chooses, because of the trouble of preening herself as she does it; she is usually content to show that you merely tire her eyes. She often seems to be about to go to sleep in the middle of a remark: there is quite a long and anxious pause, and then she continues, like a clock that hesitates, bored in the middle of its strike.)

LADY MARY (arching her brows). It is only you, Ernest; I thought there was some one here (and she also bestows herself on cushions).

ERNEST (a little piqued, and deserting the footstool). Had a very tiring day also, Mary?

LADY MARY (yawning). Dreadfully. Been trying on engagement-rings all the morning.

ERNEST (who is as fond of gossip as the oldest club member). What's that? (To AGATHA.) Is it Brocklehurst?

(The energetic AGATHA nods.)

You have given your warm young heart to Brocky?

(LADY MARY is impervious to his humour, but he continues bravely.)

I don't wish to fatigue you, Mary, by insisting on a verbal answer, but if, without straining yourself, you can signify Yes or No, won't you make the effort?

(She indolently flashes a ring on her most important finger, and he starts back melodramatically.)

The ring! Then I am too late, too late! (Fixing LADY MARY sternly, like a prosecuting counsel.) May I ask, Mary, does Brocky know? Of course, it was that terrible mother of his who pulled this through. Mother does everything for Brocky. Still, in the eyes of the law you will be, not her wife, but his, and, therefore, I hold that Brocky ought to be informed. Now—

(He discovers that their languorous eyes have closed.)

If you girls are shamming sleep in the expectation that I shall awaken you in the manner beloved of ladies, abandon all such hopes.

(CATHERINE and AGATHA look up without speaking.)

LADY MARY (speaking without looking up). You impertinent boy.

ERNEST (eagerly plucking another epigram from his quiver). I knew that was it, though I don't know everything. Agatha, I'm not young enough to know everything.

(He looks hopefully from one to another, but though they try to grasp this, his brilliance baffles them.)

AGATHA (his secret admirer). Young enough?

ERNEST (encouragingly). Don't you see? I'm not young enough to know everything.

AGATHA. I'm sure it's awfully clever, but it's so puzzling.

(Here CRICHTON ushers in an athletic, pleasant-faced young clergyman, MR. TREHERNE, who greets the company.)

CATHERINE. Ernest, say it to Mr. Treherne.

ERNEST. Look here, Treherne, I'm not young enough to know everything.

TREHERNE. How do you mean, Ernest?

ERNEST. (a little nettled). I mean what I say.

LADY MARY. Say it again; say it more slowly.

ERNEST. I'm—not—young—enough—to—know—everything.

TREHERNE. I see. What you really mean, my boy, is that you are not old enough to know everything.

ERNEST. No, I don't.

TREHERNE. I assure you that's it.

LADY MARY. Of course it is.

CATHERINE. Yes, Ernest, that's it.

(ERNEST, in desperation, appeals to CRICHTON.)

ERNEST. I am not young enough, Crichton, to know everything.

(It is an anxious moment, but a smile is at length extorted from CRICHTON as with a corkscrew.)

CRICHTON. Thank you, sir. (He goes.)

ERNEST (relieved). Ah, if you had that fellow's head, Treherne, you would find something better to do with it than play cricket. I hear you bowl with your head.

TREHERNE (with proper humility). I'm afraid cricket is all I'm good for, Ernest.

CATHERINE (who thinks he has a heavenly nose). Indeed, it isn't. You are sure to get on, Mr. Treherne.

TREHERNE. Thank you, Lady Catherine.

CATHERINE. But it was the bishop who told me so. He said a clergyman who breaks both ways is sure to get on in England.

TREHERNE. I'm jolly glad.

(The master of the house comes in, accompanied by LORD BROCKLEHURST. The EARL OF LOAM is a widower, a philanthropist, and a peer of advanced ideas. As a widower he is at least able to interfere in the domestic concerns of his house—to rummage in the drawers, so to speak, for which he has felt an itching all his blameless life; his philanthropy has opened quite a number of other drawers to him; and his advanced ideas have blown out his figure. He takes in all the weightiest monthly reviews, and prefers those that are uncut, because he perhaps never looks better than when cutting them; but he does not read them, and save for the cutting it would suit him as well merely to take in the covers. He writes letters to the papers, which are printed in a type to scale with himself, and he is very jealous of those other correspondents who get his type. Let laws and learning, art and commerce die, but leave the big

type to an intellectual aristocracy. He is really the reformed House of Lords which will come some day.

Young LORD BROCKLEHURST is nothing save for his rank. You could pick him up by the handful any day in Piccadilly or Holborn, buying socks—or selling them.)

LORD LOAM (expansively). You are here, Ernest. Feeling fit for the voyage, Treherne?

TREHERNE. Looking forward to it enormously.

LORD LOAM. That's right. (He chases his children about as if they were chickens.) Now then, Mary, up and doing, up and doing. Time we had the servants in. They enjoy it so much.

LADY MARY. They hate it.

LORD LOAM. Mary, to your duties. (And he points severely to the tea-table.)

ERNEST (twinkling). Congratulations, Brocky.

LORD BROCKLEHURST (who detests humour). Thanks.

ERNEST. Mother pleased?

LORD BROCKLEHURST (with dignity). Mother is very pleased.

ERNEST. That's good. Do you go on the yacht with us?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Sorry I can't. And look here, Ernest, I will not be called Brocky.

ERNEST. Mother don't like it?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. She does not. (He leaves ERNEST, who forgives him and begins to think about his speech. CRICHTON enters.)

LORD LOAM (speaking as one man to another). We are quite ready, Crichton. (CRICHTON is distressed.)

LADY MARY (sarcastically). How Crichton enjoys it!

LORD LOAM (frowning). He is the only one who doesn't; pitiful creature.

CRICHTON (shuddering under his lord's displeasure). I can't help being a Conservative, my lord.

LORD LOAM. Be a man, Crichton. You are the same flesh and blood as myself.

CRICHTON (in pain). Oh, my lord!

LORD LOAM (sharply). Show them in; and, by the way, they were not all here last time.

CRICHTON. All, my lord, except the merest trifles.

LORD LOAM. It must be every one. (Lowering.) And remember this, Crichton, for the time being you are my equal. (Testily.) I shall soon show you whether you are not my equal. Do as you are told.

(CRICHTON departs to obey, and his lordship is now a general. He has no pity for his daughters, and uses a terrible threat.)

And girls, remember, no condescension. The first who condescends recites. (This sends them skurrying to their labours.)

By the way, Brocklehurst, can you do anything?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. How do you mean?

LORD LOAM. Can you do anything—with a penny or a handkerchief, make them disappear, for instance?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Good heavens, no.

LORD LOAM. It's a pity. Every one in our position ought to be able to do something. Ernest, I shall probably ask you to say a few words; something bright and sparkling.

ERNEST. But, my dear uncle, I have prepared nothing.

LORD LOAM. Anything impromptu will do.

ERNEST. Oh—well—if anything strikes me on the spur of the moment.

(He unostentatiously gets the footstool into position behind the chair. CRICHTON reappears to announce the guests, of whom the first is the housekeeper.)

CRICHTON (reluctantly). Mrs. Perkins.

LORD LOAM (shaking hands). Very delighted, Mrs. Perkins. Mary, our friend, Mrs. Perkins.

LADY MARY. How do you do, Mrs. Perkins? Won't you sit here?