Bernard Shaw

Pen Portraits and Reviews

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PEN PORTRAITS AND REVIEWS

HOW WILLIAM ARCHER IMPRESSED BERNARD SHAW

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From a volume entitled Three Plays, by William Archer (Constable & Co., 1927)

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William Archer, though the most lucid and unequivocal of writers, was in person and manner probably the most deceptive man of his time. Nobody could have been less of an impostor in character; yet he took in all his contemporaries, even those who were fairly intimate with him. One of the cleverest of our younger essayists has described him as a dour Scot, without the slightest sense of humor, hard, logical, with an ability that was always in cold storage. This was not a stranger's deduction from his writings. It was a personal impression so strong that no study of his writings could quite dispel it. Not until the last London journalist who has met him has perished will William Archer be judged by his writings; and even in them there is an emotional reticence that will leave an incomplete picture of the man, though they will do him more justice than he ever did to himself. For the present, there is a fabulous Archer who is extremely unlike the real Archer, and much less amiable.

Had the fabulous Archer been the real one, our long friendship would have been impossible: indeed any

friendship with him would have been impossible. Fortunately the real Archer was, like myself, the victim of an unsleeping and incorrigible sense of humor: the very quality (or fault) which the fabulous Archer utterly lacked. No doubt when we first met as young men of the same age some forty-five years ago, I interested him as a person free from certain superstitions that had been oppressive to him; but I interested him still more by being so laughably free, not only from superstitions recognized by him as such, but from many conventions which he had never dreamt of challenging, that I appealed irresistibly to him as an incarnate joke. The Shavianismus tickled him enormously; and he was never tired of quoting not only my jokes, but my heresies and paradoxes, many of which have by this time become platitudes. The way to get on with Archer was to amuse him: to argue with him was dangerous. The invaluable precept of Robert Owen: “Never argue: repeat your assertion,” established me with Archer on the footing of a privileged lunatic, and made quarrels impossible.

Archer had the air of a stoic: he was really a humorist to whom a jest was worth more than most of the things common men prize. For instance, he was unlucky enough to have trouble with one of his eyes. He went to an oculist, and returned so radiant that I concluded that the oculist had cured him. On the contrary, the oculist had diagnosed amblyopia. “What is amblyopia?” said Archer. “Well,” said the oculist, “the eye is quite perfect. There is no lesion or defect of any sort. A first-class eye. Only, it does not see anything.” Archer found this so funny that he thought half

his sight well lost for the fun of repeating it to me and everyone else.

Another instance, in which money was at stake. Though a thoroughbred Scot, he was usually so indifferent to it, so untouched by vulgar ambition or by the least taint of snobbery, so sensibly unpretentious in his habits, so content to go to the pit when he paid to enter a theatre or even in the steerage when he made a long voyage, that nothing but a stroke of luck could ever have made him rich; but when he got married he conscientiously set to work to accumulate savings; and by doing too much journalism he succeeded in making some provision for family contingencies. Unfortunately, on the best advice, he invested it all in Australian banks; and Australian banks presently went smash. I have known men reduced to fury and despair by less serious losses. Archer was sustained and even elated by our friend John Mackinnon Robertson. Robertson, not at that time the Right Honorable (he had not yet entered on the distinguished parliamentary career which he managed to combine so oddly with an equally distinguished literary activity), had just written an economic treatise entitled The Fallacy of Saving. He sent a copy to Archer; and it arrived simultaneously with the bad news from Australia. Archer at once sat down and wrote, “My dear Robertson: I am already completely convinced of the fallacy of saving, thank you.” He came to me to tell me the story, chuckling with the enjoyment of a man who had just heard that his uncle had died in Australia and left him a million. Had he been a giggling fribble, incapable of his own distress, I should have had no patience with him. But, as I shall presently shew,

never was there a man less a trifler than William Archer. He laughed at his misfortunes because things of the mind were important to him (humor is purely mental), and things of the body and of the pocket, as long as they stopped short of disablement and painful privation, relatively trivial. The sight of one eye did not matter provided he could see with the other; and he, who set very little store by what people call good living, could hardly be expected to feel much concern about savings whilst he could pay his way with earnings: a comic speech consoled him for both losses.

Why was it, then, that he produced so strong an impression of dourness, unbending Puritan rigidity, and total lack of humor?

The explanation is that in spite of his lifelong preoccupation with the theatre, he was not a dramatic, self-expressive person. Physically he was a tall upstanding well-built good-looking Scot, keeping his figure and bearing to the last. He had an agreeable voice and unaffected manners, and no touch of malice in him. But nobody could tell from any external sign what he was thinking about, or how he felt. The amblyopic eye may have contributed to this air of powerful reserve; but the reserve was real: it was a habit that had become first nature to him. In modern psycho-pathological terms it was a repression that had become a complex. Accustomed as I was to this, he amazed even me once. He had just completed his translation of Ibsen’s Little Eyolf; and he read it to two or three friends of whom I was one. His reading was clear, intelligent, cold, without a trace of emotion, and rather wooden in the more moving passages. When he came to the last pages he

suddenly handed me the book, and said, formally and with a marked access of woodenness, “Shaw: I must ask you to finish the reading for me. My feelings will not allow me to proceed.” The contrast between the matter and the manner of this speech would have been irresistibly comic had any doubt of the sincerity of his distress been possible. I took the proof-sheets in silence, and finished the reading as desired. We were face to face with a man in whom dissimulation had become so instinctive that it had become his natural form of emotional expression. No wonder he seemed a monster of insensibility to those who did not know him very intimately.

To explain this, I must cast back to the year 1730 as a date in religious history. In that year, just before Wesley began Methodism in England, a Scots minister named John Glas was cast out by the General Assembly of the Kirk in Scotland as a Congregationalist heretic. Glas thought this was so much the worse for the Kirk in Scotland. Bible in hand, and strong in the Protestant right to private judgment, he founded one of the innumerable Separatist sects that arose in the eighteenth century. Shakespear would have called him a Brownist. He maintained that any group of persons organized according to the instructions of St Paul to Timothy, and qualified as godly according to the prescription of Matthew, was independent of any Kirk or General Assembly or ecclesiastical authority whatsoever, and was answerable to God alone. The aim of his own group was the realization of Christ’s kingdom as defined in the famous reply to Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world.” Glas’s son-

in-law, Sandeman, carried this doctrine to England, where the groups became known as Sandemanians.

Now of Separation there is no end until every human being is a Separate Church, for which there is much to be said. The Separatists continue to separate. In 1804 John Walker, Bachelor of Divinity (for so I construe the letters B.D.) and Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin, separated himself from the Episcopal Church of Ireland, and founded a sect called by him The Church of God, and by the profane The Walkerites. Its tenets resembled those of the Glasites so closely that there was talk of an amalgamation; but the Glasites were Sabbatarians; the Walkerites held that Christ had discarded the Sabbath; and so they could not agree. Anyhow Walkerism was superfluous in Scotland, where its numbers were often so small that worship among them was a family affair conducted by the head of the household, assisted by such male members of the sect as happened to be present. As the Glasites had flourishing congregations in many centres, Walkerite children would be sent to a Glasite Meeting when there was no Walkerite Meeting to send them to.

In the second generation of Walkerites, a Miss Walker married a Mr Archer. And one of their sons complicated the faith by marrying a daughter of James Morison, one of the shining lights of Glasism. From that exogamous alliance William Archer sprang. If ever there was a doubly predestined heir of grace, William, one would think, was he. And, on the whole, he lived up to his antecedents. But God fulfils Himself in many ways, and often in extremely unexpected ones. As William grew up, he felt obliged to

pursue his hereditary Separatism to the point of separating himself not only from the Separatists, but from the curious fetish worship of the Bible, and the idolization of Christ, with which all the sects and Churches were still saturated.

This looks like a complete explanation of the reserve that was a second nature with him. But, if you are an English reader, do not infer too much from your ignorance of Scoto-Norwegian Separatism. Long before Archer's views had formed themselves sufficiently to threaten a schism in the family if he gave voice to them, he had profited, without the smallest friction, by the fact that both Walkerites and Glasites regarded religion as too sacred to be made a subject of private conversation. They actually barred private prayer, and not only neither asked their children controversial questions nor permitted them to put any, but would not allow even a catechism to come between them and their God. In their view, you were either damned or saved by your own nature and the act of God; and any attempt to force God's hand in the transaction was sedition in His kingdom. Thus William was never driven to lie about his beliefs or about the family beliefs. He was simply not allowed to talk about either. He was, however, expected to go to Meeting when there was a meeting (Walkerite or Glasite) within reach, and not to laugh when his sense of humor got the better of the solemnity of the occasion. In the latter observance the Archer children were by no means uniformly successful. In William as in Mark Twain, the meetings had a marked homeopathic effect.

Another feature of Separatism which favored his freedom of thought was its anti-clericalism. The common English

association of clericalism with piety is often misleading. The revolt against institutional religion which moved George Fox to regard a priest of any denomination as Mr Winston Churchill regards a Bolshevist, and to revile a church as a steeple house, has produced all the Separatist sects, and has in our day invaded even the Church of England in the person of the most intellectually eminent of its dignitaries. William Archer's father would have been surprised if anyone had called him an anti-clerical; but he had the Separatist habit of assuming that parsons are inadmissible acquaintances. The family atmosphere, if not explicitly anti-clerical, was, to say the least, not prelatical.

Archer's brother and collaborator in their translation of Peer Gynt tells me that he never heard his father say a word of any kind on any religious subject. This gives in a single sentence a vision of the extraordinary reserve imposed by the Separatism of Glas and Walker, surviving as a habit long after the original impulse had lost its fervor, and had even provoked a reaction. The reaction in William Archer carried him to a Modernism which would have been taken by Glas and Walker as unmistakeable evidence of his predestined damnation; but the habit of reserve remained.

It was reinforced as he grew older by the clash of his political opinions with those of the Glasites, who interpreted Christ's declaration that His kingdom was not of this world as implying a duty of unquestioning submission to all duly constituted secular authority. This view had settled down into simple political Conservatism; and when Archer's inner light led him to a vigorous Radicalism, it became necessary for him to extend his reserve from religion to politics, or else

grieve his people very sorely, a cruelty of which he was quite incapable. He was hereditarily affectionate, and even suffered from a family inability to control his diaphragm (I borrow this quaint diagnosis from an expert) which made it impossible for him to command his voice when he was deeply moved, which explains both why he could not finish reading Little Eyolf and why up to the moment of relinquishing the attempt he had had to constrain himself so rigidly as to seem a wooden image rather than a very emotional man.

He was not himself conscious of the extent to which the Glasite diathesis influenced him. I do not believe that he knew or cared anything about the constitution or origin of Glasism: all he could tell me to satisfy my curiosity as a connoisseur in religious beliefs was that the performance, as he called it, consisted mainly in his grandfather reading the Bible phrase by phrase, and extracting from every phrase some not immediately obvious significance, the more far-fetched and fantastic the better. The grandson was interested neither in Kirk nor Conventicle, but in the theatre. He was prepared to attend to Shakespear, but not to Glasite hermeneutics. He had a certain admiration for his grandfather’s ingenuity as an exegete, and was rather proud of him; but he soon learnt to defend himself from his expositions by an acquirement that often stood him in good stead in the theatre later on. He could slip his finger under the next page of his open Bible; go fast asleep; and turn the page without waking up when the rustling of all the other Bibles as their readers turned over struck on his sleeping ear and started a reflex action.

If I had known this when I attempted to read my first play to him I might not have abandoned it for years as an unfinished failure. He was utterly contemptuous of its construction; but this I did not mind, as I classed constructed plays with artificial flowers, clockwork mice, and the like. Unfortunately, when I came to the second act, something—possibly something exegetic in my tone—revived the old protective habit. He fell into a deep slumber; and I softly put the manuscript away and let him have his sleep out. When I mentioned this to our friend Henry Arthur Jones he reminded me of a member of the *Comédie Française*, who, on being remonstrated with for sleeping whilst an author was reading a play, said “Sleep is a criticism.” This was my own view of the case; and I might never have meddled with the stage again had not Archer unconsciously discounted the incident one day by telling me the tale of his famous grandfather.

Thus he never came to know what his grandfather’s religion was. He dismissed it, and most of Scriptural theology with it, as flat nonsense. And from this estimate he never to the end of his days retreated. It may seem strange that a man whose literary bent was so strong that he made literature his profession, whose ear was so musical that he could write excellent verse, and whose judgment was so respected that he was accepted as the most serious critic of his day, should be able to read the dregs of Elizabethan drama and not to read the Bible; but the fact remains that when I was writing my preface on Christianity (to Androcles and the Lion) and, having just read the New Testament through, asked him whether he had read the Gospels lately,

and what he made of them, he replied that he had tried, but “could not stick it.” The doctrine was nonsense to him; and he had no patience with it because he took no interest in it. I pleaded that though Matthew had muddled his gospel by stringing sayings together in the wrong order, a more intelligible arrangement of them could be discovered by reading the other evangelists; but this produced no impression on him: the subject simply bored him; and he rather resented any attempt on my part to give the slightest importance to it. This was a very natural consequence of dosing a clever child prematurely with mental food that Ecumenical Councils have before now failed to digest; and parents and school committees will do well to make a careful note of it; but in Archer’s case the intolerance it produced became a quality, as his book on India proves. There was no morbid nonsense about understanding everything and pardoning everything in the Archer family. The glimpses I had of them were quite convincing as to their being healthy-minded sensible open-air colonially rejuvenated people who, having to keep an inherited form of worship from making social life impossible, instinctively avoided sophistry and speculation, and took their intellectual course simply and downrightly. When, in what was then called The Conflict Between Religion and Science, William Archer took the side of Science, he broke away as cleanly and confidently as Glas had broken away from the Assembly or Walker from the Church of Ireland. He expressly denied having ever had any internal struggle or qualm. His only difficulty was to maintain his convictions without

making his parents unhappy; and the Separatist reserve made it quite easy to do this whilst he lived with them.

When he came to London and began to write for the Secularist press, thus breaking the Separatist silence, he resorted to a *nom de plume*, for which, in those days, there were other reasons than family ones. A then future president of the National Secular Society had been actually imprisoned for a year for publishing in The Freethinker, his weekly journal, a picture of Samuel anointing Saul, in which the costumes and accessories were those of a modern hairdresser's shop; and until the expiration of the sentence Archer had to help with a monthly review which the victim of persecution edited for his more scholarly and fastidious followers. The leaders of the Secularist movement, including at that time Mrs Besant, were delighted to welcome Archer as a brilliant young recruit, and were somewhat taken aback when he would not enter into intimate social relations with them lest they should meet his parents, and quite simply told them so in his most expressionless manner. But for the strained relations which ensued, and for his preoccupation with the theatre, he might, like Robertson, have become a familiar figure in the pulpit of South Place Chapel, and been as definitely associated with Rationalism as Mr Edward Clodd. As it was, his position was sufficiently affirmed to make me ask him one day what his parents had to say about it. His reply was that the subject was never mentioned between them, but that he supposed they must have noticed that he did not attend any place of worship. Clearly there was no bitterness nor bigotry in the matter; and the fact that there was no resistance to break down

made it impossible for a man of Archer's affectionate sensitiveness not to shield his father and mother from every contact with his heresy and its associations that could possibly be avoided without a sacrifice of his convictions.

Presently another interest came into his life. One showery day I was in New Oxford Street, probably going to or from the British Museum reading room, when I saw Archer coming towards me past Mudie's, looking much more momentous than usual. He seemed eight feet high; and his aspect was stern and even threatening, as if he were defying all Oxford Street, buses and all, to take the smallest liberty with him. His air of formidable height was partly due, perhaps, to his having draped himself in a buff-colored mackintosh which descended to his calves. But it was quaintly aided by the contrast of his inches with those of a lady who clung to his arm to keep pace with his unmerciful strides. She had a small head and a proportionately small comely face, winsome and ready to smile when not actually smiling. I had never seen Archer with a woman on his arm before, nor indeed concerning himself with one in any way; and, as the future author of Man and Superman, I feared the worst. And, sure enough, I was immediately introduced to the lady as his selection for the destiny of being Mrs Archer.

The marriage seemed a great success. Mrs Archer fitted herself into the simple and frugal life of her husband quite naturally, caring no more for fashion or manufactured pleasures and luxuries than he did. There came a wonderful son: he who figures in the correspondence of Robert Louis Stevenson as Tomarcher. Mrs Archer found the world paradise enough first with her Willie, and then with her man

and her boy. She tolerated me and indulged me as an incarnate joke because he did; and I saw rather more of him after his marriage than before it, instead of less: a rare privilege for a bachelor friend.

But the more Archer's slender means obliged him to put Mrs Archer and the boy first, and literature comparatively nowhere, the more I, having among my budget of novels that nobody would publish a book called The Irrational Knot (meaning the marriage tie), began to doubt whether domesticity was good for his career. At last I read an anonymous article on one of Archer's subjects which seemed to me a poor one. I was on the point of abusing it roundly to him one day when, to my consternation, he said, just in time, that he had written it. My concern was not because I thought the article unsatisfactory: every writer produces unsatisfactory articles occasionally. But that, good or bad, I had not recognized it as his: a failure unprecedented so far, proved to me that he had lost some of the brilliancy and unmistakeable individuality of style which had attracted me in his articles in The London Figaro long before I made his acquaintance. I knew that the way to make money in journalism is to turn out rapidly great quantities of undistinguished stuff; and I knew also that when a man marries he gives up his right to put quality of work first, and income second. I did not conceive it possible at that time that I should ever become a married man myself. With an artistic recklessness which shocks me in retrospect I told Archer that Mrs Archer was spoiling him, and that he would be a lost man unless he broke loose. He said, with that wooden formality which was the surest sign

that he was deeply moved, that he must ask me not to visit his house whilst I held opinions so disparaging to Mrs Archer.

I was not in the least offended. Indeed I never was offended by anything Archer ever said to me or wrote about me, though he sometimes expressed a quite unnecessary remorse for speeches or articles which he supposed must have been painful to me. For some time I remained under his interdict, and saw nothing of Mrs Archer. Then the unexpected happened. Archer did not break loose; but Mrs Archer did. Let me not be misunderstood. There was no gentleman in the case. It was much more interesting than that.

I forget how long Mrs Archer remained a dropped subject between us; but it was Archer himself who resumed it. I found him in a state of frank anxiety which in him indicated considerable distress of mind; and he told me that Mrs Archer fancied that there was something the matter with her, though she was, as he believed, in perfect health. Now Mrs Archer, like her husband, was not at all the sort of person her appearance suggested. She seemed dainty, unassuming, clinging. Really, she was a woman of independent character, great decision and pertinacity, and considerable physical hardihood. This I had half guessed that day in Oxford Street, but I kept the guess to myself, as it might have been taken as a wanton paradox until the sequel bore it out. When Archer told me of his perplexity I shared it, and could think of nothing to suggest.

To the rescue of this male helplessness came a remarkable lady from America, Miss Annie Payson Call, authoress of a book entitled Power through Repose, and of a

system, partly manipulative, partly sympathetic, of straightening out tangled nerves. Miss Call had the same sort of amiability as Mrs Archer, and the same overflow of energy for which selfishness was not enough. She tackled Mrs Archer; she tackled me; she tackled everybody; and as she was a charming person, nobody objected. But she found in Mrs Archer something more than the passive subject of a cure. She found a pupil, a disciple, and finally an apostle in England. Mrs Archer's vocation also was for healing sore minds and wandering wits. With what seems to me in retrospect a staggering suddenness, though in fact she had to see Tom through to his independent manhood first, she created the nerve training institution at King's Langley which survives her. Literary people in the eighteen-nineties used to write futile sequels to Ibsen's Doll's House: Mrs Archer found a real and perfectly satisfactory sequel. She became an independent professional woman most affectionately married to an independent professional man, the two complementing instead of hampering each other; for in practical matters he was full of inhibitions and diffidences from which she was vigorously free. Incidentally I ceased to be one of Willie's bachelor encumbrances. Mrs Archer, having developed considerably more practical initiative and ability than ever I possessed, took me in hand fearlessly on her new footing, and admitted me, I think, to as much of her friendship as I deserved.

Thus Archer's domesticity ceased to be a problem; and you may set him down for good and all as fortunate in his marriage. But to suggest all that his marriage meant for him I must return to the child Tom Archer. The extraordinary

companionship which Archer found in his little son could not have existed but for a double bond between them. First, Archer had retained much more of his own childhood than even his most intimate friends suspected. He must have been a very imaginative child; and he had retained so much of a child's imagination and fun that it was for some time a puzzle to me that he could be so completely fascinated as he was by Ibsen's imagination, and that yet, when I produced my Quintessence of Ibsenism, he dismissed much of the specifically adult and worldly part of it precisely as he had dismissed the Scriptural exegetics of his grandfather. This devoted Ibsenite, who translated the Master's works so forcibly and vividly, was never in the least an Ibsenist: he delighted in Ibsen's plays just as a child delights in The Arabian Nights without taking in anything of the passages which Captain Burton left unexpurgated. It was this innocence that limited his own excursions into dramatic literature; he could not see that the life around him, including his own, was teeming with dramatic material, and persisted in looking for his subjects either in literature or in fairyland.

Now it happened that Tom Archer, though so entirely his mother's son in most respects that, save for an occasional fleeting revelation in his expression, he was not a bit like Archer, had a prodigious imagination. Having no derisive brothers and sisters to make him sensitive and secretive about it, but, on the contrary, a father who took it with the tenderest seriousness, and in fact became an accomplice in all its extravagances, Tom was able to let himself go gloriously. He invented a *pays de Cocagne* which he called

Peona, which went far beyond the garret-forest in The Wild Duck, as it had no contact with limited mechanical realities. I heard much of Peona and its inhabitants at second hand, and even a little at first hand, on which occasions I swallowed every adventure with a gravity not surpassed by Archer's own. I am sure that Archer, whose youth as one of a large and robust family enjoyed no such protection, could never have felt this delicacy had he not remembered his own youth, and recognized his own imagination in his son's.

There was another experience from which he was determined to protect Tom; and that was the British boarding school, or boy farm, as William Morris called it. It was useless to romance to him about the character-forming virtues and historic glories of Eton and Harrow, Winchester and Rugby and Marlborough: he anticipated the opinions of Sanderson of Oundle, who heartily agreed with me when I expressed my opinion that these places should be razed to the ground, and their foundations sown with salt. Archer had taken his own schooling as a dayboy, and was convinced, with good reason, that this arrangement, however inconvenient for the parents, was much more wholesome for the child. Accordingly, Tom spent his childish schooldays with his people in a Surrey cottage on the façade of which Mr Edward Rimbault Dibdin inscribed the name Walden (a compliment to Thoreau) in highly artistic lettering. When he outgrew the educational resources of that primitive neighborhood the family moved to Dulwich and sent him to the college there.

Meanwhile my comment on Tom was that he was a second Rudyard Kipling; for, as I happened to know from

William Morris, Mr Kipling had been a great Peoneer in his nonage. The years in which Archer and Tom explored Peona together passed as fast as real years in a real country until at last the once inexhaustible subject of Tom dropped so completely that I actually had to ask Archer about him. To my amazement he conveyed to me, with a manner that would have done credit to a piece of mahogany, that the firm of Archer & Son of Peona had dissolved partnership. Tom, he explained, had been ill; and Archer opined that the illness had affected his character, which, he said, was totally changed. This theory of the alleged change was too summary and too surgical to convince me. But I forbore to probe; and the truth came out gradually. The child Tom, developing into the incipient man, emerged from Peona a most unnatural son. He was as keen about the glories of public schools as if he were indeed the author of Stalky and Co. He distinguished himself at Dulwich by the facility with which he turned out Latin verses, becoming Captain of the Classical Side. He joined the Officers' Training Corps, and actually made his father enlist in the Inns of Court Volunteers, a trial which Archer supported because, being a private, and having to salute Tom, who was an officer, the situation appealed to his sense of humor as well as to his conscientious public spirit. In short, he dragged Archer out of Peona with him, and imposed public schools ideals on him. Military romance alone survived from fairyland; and even that took the fashionable imperialist shape.

Up to this time Archer had, without knowing it, been a true Glasite in the essential sense. His kingdom had not been of this world. But now, what with the son grasping with

all his imaginative power at conventional military ideals, and this world beginning to treat the father with more and more of the distinguished consideration which his work earned and his unworldly character commanded, Archer had to adapt himself as far as he could to the responsibilities of his celebrity, and to set himself to make the best of convention instead of criticizing it with the independence of a young and comparatively unknown man. Every free-lance who makes a reputation has to go through this phase; but Archer was under the special emotional pressure of having to adapt himself to Tom’s Kiplingesque war mentality in and out of season. He became as conventional as it was in his nature to be, and indeed, for Tom’s sake, perhaps a little more, though the public school had taken away his playmate.

Presently Tom’s boyhood passed like his childhood, and left him a young man, still his mother’s son in respect of being under average military size and considerably over average military vigor of mind and practical initiative. Oxford, where he had expected to distinguish himself because he had done so at Dulwich, did not suit him. True, his aptitude for classical exercises did not desert him. He took honors in law, and was in no sense a failure. But Oxford was something of a failure for him. The struggle for life was not real enough there for a youth who had a passion for the military realism of soldiering. When he left Oxford to begin adult life, he worked as a solicitor for a couple of years in London. Then an opening in America, with a promise of a speedy return to rejoin his family at home, took him across the Atlantic.

Two months later the gulf of war opened at the feet of our young men. Tom rushed back to hurl himself into it. Amid the volcanoes of Messines he was serving as a lance-corporal in “the dear old G Company” of the London Scottish. Invalided home, he accepted a commission, and for a year was able to do no more than sit on the brink of the gulf in the Ordnance until his strength returned, when he volunteered afresh for the firing line as lieutenant in the King’s Own Scottish Borderers. In February 1918 he married Alys Morty, cousin to a comrade-at-arms fallen at Messines, and had a deliriously happy honeymoon in Ireland. Then, the war still dragging on, he hurled himself into the gulf again; and this time, at Mount Kemmel, it closed on him, and his father saw him no more. He left his young widow to take his place in his parents’ affections, the newly found beloved daughter succeeding to the newly lost beloved son. Yet Archer was loth to let the son go. He renewed an old interest in super-rational research; investigated dreams and the new psycho-analysis; and even experimented unsuccessfully in those posthumous conversations in which so many of the bereaved found comfort. And so, between daughter and son, the adventure of parentage never ended for Archer.

When the war broke out he was past military age, and had to confine his part in it to countering the German propaganda service and doing some of our own, an employment in which his knowledge of languages stood him in good stead. When the Armistice made an end of that, his own bent reasserted itself and took him back to the theatre, and (save where his memories of Tom were concerned) to militant Rationalism.

His great work of translating Ibsen had by this time been brought to an end by Ibsen's death. I am myself a much-translated author; and I know how hard the lot of a translator is if he is sensitive to frantic abuse both by rival or would-be rival translators, and by literary men inflamed by an enthusiasm for the author (gained from the translations they abuse) which convinces them that his opinions are their own, and that the translator, not seeing this, has missed the whole point of the work. I use the word frantic advisedly: the lengths to which these attacks go are incredible. At one time it was the fashion in the literary cliques to dismiss Archer's translations as impossible. I told them it was no use: that Archer-Ibsen had seized the public imagination as it had seized theirs, and would beat any other brand of Ibsen in English. And it was so. Whenever a translation was produced without the peculiar character that Archer gave to his, it had no character at all, no challenge, at best only a drawing room elegance that was a drawback rather than an advantage. When Mr Anstey burlesqued Ibsen in Punch, he did it by burlesquing Archer: without Archer the plays would not have bitten deep enough to be burlesqued. Even in the case of Peer Gynt, which moved several enthusiasts to attempt translations following the rhymes and metres of the original (I began one myself, with our friend Braekstad translating for me literally, line by line, and got as far as a couple of pages or so), the unrhymed translation by Archer and his brother Colonel Charles Archer held its own against the most ingenious and elaborate rival versions. Whenever Peer Gynt was quoted it was always in the Archer version. I have already given the explanation.

Archer understood and cared for Ibsen's imagination. For his sociological views he cared so little that he regarded them mostly as aberrations when he was conscious of them. Thus, undistracted by Ibsen's discussions, he went straight for his poetry, and reproduced every stroke of imagination in a phraseology that invented itself *ad hoc* in his hands. As nothing else really mattered, the critics who could not see this, and would have it that everything else mattered, neither made nor deserved to make any permanent impression. Besides, the air of Norway breathed through his versions. He had breathed it himself from his childhood during his frequent visits, beginning at the age of three, to the Norwegian home of his grandparents, where he had two unmarried aunts who exercised his tenderness and powers of admiration very beneficently. As to the few lyrics which occur in Ibsen's plays, and which would have baffled a prosaic translator, they gave Archer no trouble at all: he was at his best in them. If it had been possible for the father of a family to live by writing verse in the nineteenth century, Archer would probably have done more in that manner on his own account.

How far he sacrificed a career as an original playwright to putting the English-speaking peoples in possession of Ibsen is an open question. In my opinion he instinctively chose the better part, because the theatre was not to him a workshop but part of his fairyland. He never really got behind the scenes, and never wanted to. The illusion that had charmed his youth was so strong and lasting that not even fifty years of professional theatre-going in London could dispel it. Inevitably then he liked the theatre as he found it at first: