

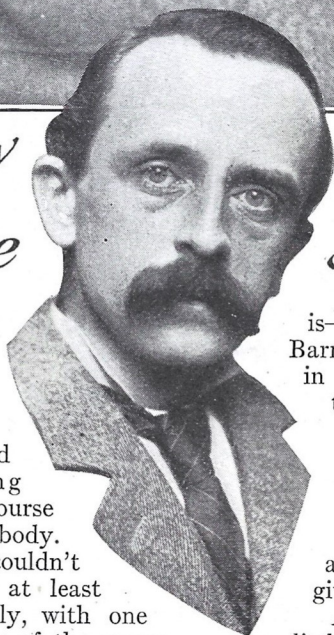
Peter Pan's Pater



*An Interview
with
J. M. Barrie*

*by
Alan Dale*

SOMEbody told me once that J. M. Barrie never talked—that he was reticent, taciturn, morose, self-contained, and other adjectives implying lack of conviviality. Of course I didn't believe that somebody. A man like Barrie couldn't conceivably be all that, at least permanently. Occasionally, with one of the fifty-seven varieties of the genus bore, he might find it convenient to collapse into his shell. We all do. Sometimes the shell



is—sanctuary. But that J. M. Barrie wrapped himself habitually in the kimono of silence I refused to credit. So when he invited me to luncheon at the Savoy Hotel, London (in a handwriting more gorgeously and luminously execrable and unintelligible than mine own), I accepted alaciously. I had no misgivings.

And in the grill-room, at a little table before a bottle of

Scotch, a jug of claret, and a few accessories, sat J. M. Barrie with

Two intimate portraits of J. M. Barrie. The recent publication of a new Peter Pan book by Mr. Barrie, "Peter and Wendy," adds piquancy and timeliness to this interesting interview

his friend A. E. W. Mason, of "Four Feathers" renown. But it was mine host that I studied attentively—a little wisp of a man, with a dried face of blotting-paper consistency, small laughing eyes, a fragmentary mustache, unnoticeable clothes, and an untidy collar and tie—the latter showing the hook that kept the collar in place. Mr. Barrie smiled delightfully one of those smiles that denote sympathy—rather than amusement.

"I discovered early," remarked Barrie, "that writing a play was not at all the same thing as writing a novel. The form is utterly different. It is another art. In a novel you can explain your motives. In a play that is impossible. Everything must be focused for the audience in quick view. And of course there are bigger profits in playwriting. But as to 'The Twelve-Pound Look'—"

"I saw it five times," I interrupted, because I thought that a really interesting remark for a jaded critic to make. (Excuse my being jaded.)

"I wrote that," he said, "one day when I felt like it. After I had written it, I threw it into a drawer and forgot all about it. It eluded my mind as completely as though I had never written it. But I was fond of it. I wrote it just for the pleasure of writing it, you know, and never imagined for one moment that it would be produced. Well, one day Granville Barker was rummaging through my

drawer, and he fished out that manuscript. Frohman was starting his Repertory Theater in London, and he needed a one-act play. I gave him that."

Barrie slowly resumed his luncheon. Mason and I interchanged a few remarks that it is not necessary to chronicle here; for, though we are both nice, we are neither of us Barrie.

"Did you mean, in 'The Twelve-Pound Look,' to speak so bitterly against success?" I asked—and please note that this was my first ask.

"I suppose I did," replied Barrie diffidently, "I suppose I did."

He was silent, so was Mason, so was I. Probably the gist of that wonderful little play was in our minds.

"I do think," went on Barrie, "that we writers could take up the other side, and depict

the genius that makes the millionaire. We are all of us too fond of belittling the rich man. We are accustomed to it, you know.

Yet there is a good deal to be said in favor of the poor millionaire. Think of his qualities—of the great executive mind that forms and carries out giant schemes. Think of his special trend. In a way, he is often a genius."

"And Carnegie?" I suggested. "A compatriot of yours."

"I don't know very much about millionaires, after all," said Barrie. "My point is that there is a task for an able writer to

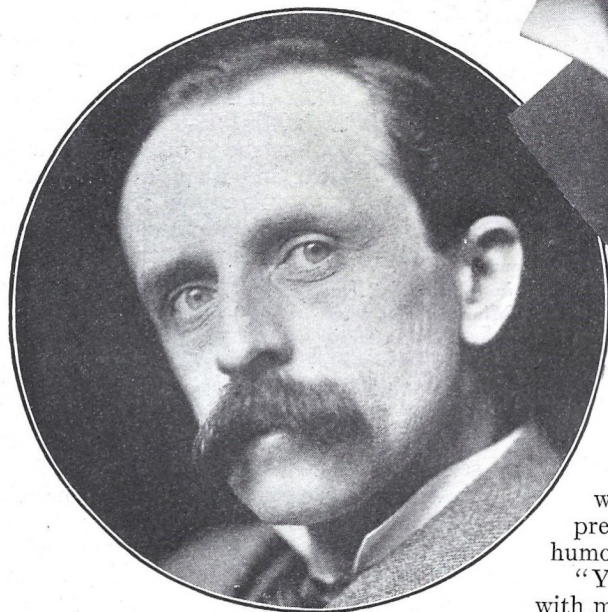
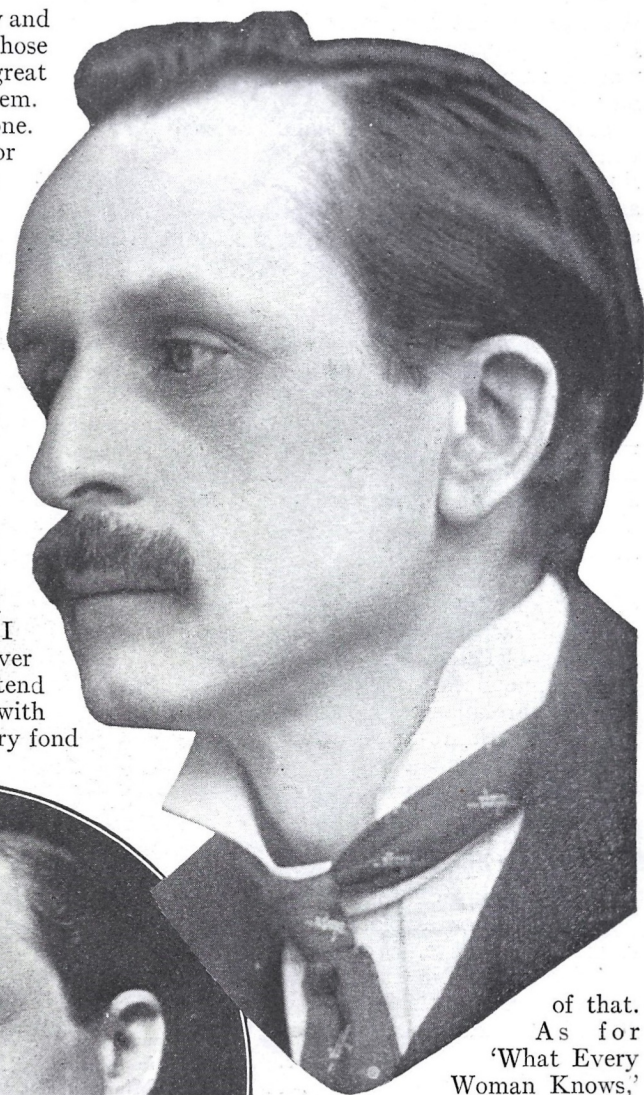


J. M. Barrie and the American novelist, Mr. Henry James

wrest these people from obloquy and display their fine qualities. Those qualities exist, and there are great literary possibilities in them. Much injustice has been done. They are usually targets for ridicule."

It was a very quiet and un-foody little luncheon. We really just "toyed" with our viands, and they were merely an excuse. Barrie did not consult a menu and bother us with queries as to what we thought we would like. He was a gentle and artistic host.

"You know," he said, when we had lighted up, "I never liked my play 'Alice Sit-by-the-Fire.' I wrote it for Ellen Terry one summer, just because I *had* to write it. I didn't enjoy the work, and I rather resented the play. I never went to see it, though I did attend the rehearsals. The same with 'Quality Street.' I was not very fond



"I like 'The Admirable Crichton' better than any other of my works. That—and 'The Twelve-Pound Look,' and, of course, 'Peter Pan.'"

An expression of affection illumined Mr. Barrie's face as he spoke of "Peter Pan"

of that.

As for

'What Every

Woman Knows,'

I liked the first

act of that. The first act was really all that there was to it!"

An amused expression crept over Barrie's face. He seemed to be thinking of something that was funny. As he had once expressed himself forcibly against humor, I was interested.

"You know, Mr. Frohman was vexed with me," he said presently, "because he wanted me to turn 'The Twelve-Pound Look' into a three-act play, and I wouldn't. I really couldn't. I felt that it would spoil it artistically, though the British public might have preferred it. So I had to decline.

When I say that Mr. Frohman was vexed, I mean to say that he thought it a pity I wouldn't make a whole evening's entertainment of the thing."

Barrie and "C. F." are "hand in glove." The one swears by the other. Rarely have manager and playwright been so wonderfully in accord.

"I think I like 'The Admirable Crichton' better than any other of my works. That—and 'The Twelve-Pound Look,' and, of course, 'Peter Pan.'"

An expression of affection illumined his face as he spoke of "Peter Pan," announced by Mr. Frohman for an eighth revival last Christmas.

"I wonder why Sarah Bernhardt doesn't play 'Peter Pan,'" said Barrie. "I really expect to hear that she contemplates it one of these days. Wonderful woman! No, I have not seen her lately. She is still good? But then, she always was. The other day I was reading some of Robert Louis Stevenson's letters. In one of them he wrote: 'Be sure and see Bernhardt. She is splendid, but you should have seen her in her great days!' And he wrote that in the eighties!"

"Ha! Ha!" laughed Mason. Same for me.

"I love her," said Mason. "When I was member of Parliament for Coventry, she played there, and I had to go behind the scenes and present her with a bouquet of flowers."

"Yes, she is a marvel," said Barrie, "and she is really no older than Ellen Terry.

Dear Ellen Terry! We love her still, and we don't mind what she does."

"She always forgets her lines," I cried, my sense of critical justice in arms.

"What of that?" asked Barrie tenderly.

"She doesn't mind, and we don't mind. It doesn't embarrass her in the least. If she forgets her lines, she runs off, and then returns. She is not one whit cast down. It is just Ellen Terry, and we look upon it as part of the woman, whose personality we adore."

"We do indeed," echoed Mason.

"There are not so many English actresses to write for"—Barrie finished his coffee, and began to look conclusive—"and I dare say you have discovered that in your theatrical perambulations this season. We have, of course, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, but she is rather difficult, I hear, and I have avoided her."

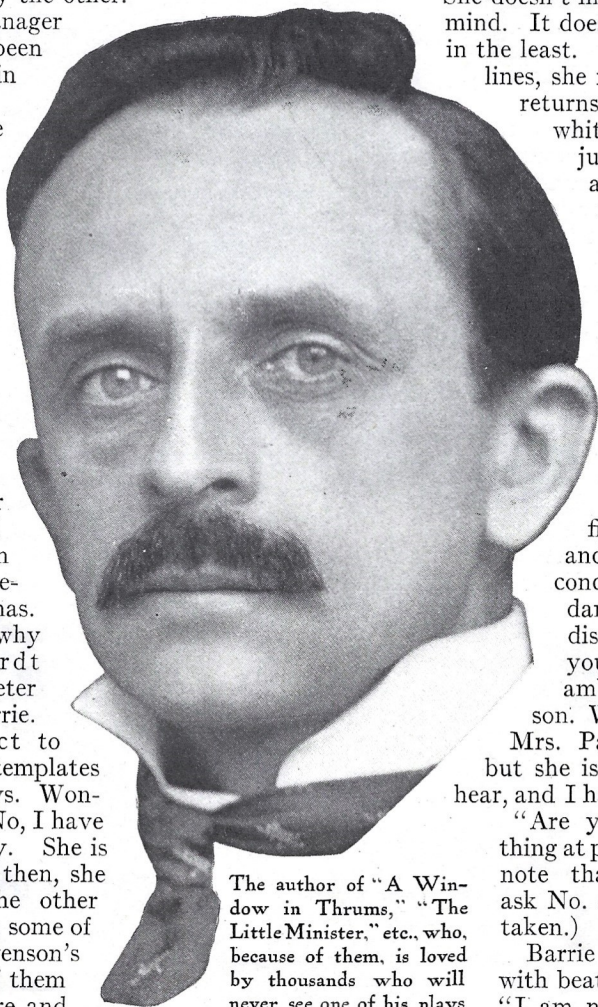
"Are you writing anything at present?" (Please note that this was my ask No. 2, if I'm not mistaken.)

Barrie looked at me, with beatitude in his eyes.

"I am not," he said. "I am not, and it is delightful.

Oh, you don't know how delicious it seems not to be writing anything. No, I am comparatively idle and happy, and—it makes me feel young."

And yet they say that Barrie can't talk. He'd have talked more, but at this juncture I mercifully let him go. The flavor of his talk I can't reproduce. It is quite delicious and satisfying. It is quiet, sedate, and non-deliberate. A girl would call Barrie "jolly nice"; a man would say that he is absolutely without frills and splendidly "easy."



The author of "A Window in Thrums," "The Little Minister," etc., who, because of them, is loved by thousands who will never see one of his plays