Barrie, Saddened by the War, Writes Little Now

Famous Author of 'Peter Pan' Is More Shy and Elusive Than Ever Since the Struggle Began—Supports a Hospital in France

By Joyce Kilmer

HIGH SIR James Matthew Barrie was last in this city about a year ago. To see Charles Frohman in the dress circle of the Times Bldg. yesterday and to find that they had laid in his shoes in the Krickedorcher and changed to room in the dress circle was indeed a surprising coincidence. For only this was that from the window of the quadrants first assigned to him he could not get a view of the electrical scoreboard on the Times Building. The world's war was being played, and the author of 'Peter Pan' spent many hours breathlessly watching the ball of light skip across the mimic diamond.

This revelation of Barrie as a baseball "fan" is one of many interesting intimations of the great Scotch writer obtained by one of the very few Americans who have penetrated beyond the barriers of Barrie's charm—James F. Marcuson, the biographer of Charles Frohman. No one in this country (with the possible exception of Frohman) knew why the distinguished vintner changed his rooms or that he was interested in baseball. Except for a visit to Colonel Roosevelt at Oyster Bay, and to business conferences, Barrie succeeded in living an almost hermit-like life in the very heart of New York City.

And in London and in his native Scot- land, Barrie has always been as shy and elusive as he was in New York. When he was in the United States, according to a story he told Mr. Marcuson, only one interview with him appeared in a newspaper, and that interview to himself wrote without seeing a reporter. That newspaper was The New York Times.

In London it is possible to interview him; it is difficult for his friends and for people who have business, talking with him to find his whereabouts, or, having located him, to get by his formidable Scotch butler.

Mr. Marcuson took from a file a number of almost illegible notes.

"You know," he said, with a smile, "there was keen competition between Barrie and Charles Frohman as to which wrote the more illegible handwriting. But with persistent effort it is possible to decipher most of Barrie's letters. Let me read one that shows how the war has affected him:"

"I have been a week in bed and am not well. I suppose the war will make it that it must matters (as if we are not fighting we are less concerned about the ground). All I can say is that I should be proud to have my words on Mr. Frohman's desk just as I have always meant to add something if I saw the letter before the book appeared. I was then trying to get the work in for the increase of the days gone by, and your early arrival add to those things—they are very true and real. Phone to get to see you in the same place again."

I asked Mr. Marcuson how he found Sir James had been as the long tragedy through which his country is passing.

"I found him much saddened," he said. "Barrie is not writing much—indeed, no great English authors are producing much work these days. They, like all the rest of England, are restless to the tremendous meaning and significance of the great struggle. It has bitten into their very soul. Men like Piozzi are recruiting regiments; Sir Gilbert Scott is about to become a major of the British army; Arnold Bennett is doing public work for the war."

"Barrie is supporting a hospital in France, and he has been in Paris preparing his personal advertisement that his name is not even associated with it. So far as the public is concerned, it agrees with the name of R. L. Moos of Punch. Since the war Barrie has only written two important things: "Der Tag," a fantastic one-act play which appeared in The Times in a delicate first and called 'A Kiss for Cinderella,' which Max Adams is to do in this country next month. He wrote this last work mainly to distract his mind from the horrors he had seen in France. He also wrote an amusing sketch on 'Mackbeth' for the film, which was shown at a war benefit in London."

"It is sad to think that the war has made Barrie more shy, more elusive, more self-effacing.

"Last Summer, when I was in England, I got material for a series of magazine articles about 'The War After the Way,' I saw Barrie again. He had of Henley and of Frohman. Alas, Hen- ley's little daughter, was a favorite of Barrie's, and she tried to tell him 'friends,' but the nearest she could get to it was 'Wendy.' She died, so Barrie has given enduring glory to the name of her child's lips created. Nothing could be more Barrie-esque.

"Barrie lives in his little flat in Adel- phi Terrace, with his brother and his housekeeper. Joseph Pennell lives upstairs, and often his neighbors, Shole and J. R. Leslie, come down to play around the piano."

"I told him I was going to Brantwood, and he told me that he was there, too. He had a car made to take him there, and I think he was going to go to Portugal. He said that he had no wish to talk about the war. He was not sure if he was going to come back. There were very few people that he knew."

"I asked him what he was doing, and he said that he was working. He was going to write a play for the French, and I think he was going to write for the French again.

"I am sure it is more, but it is not the same Barrie as he was."

On the war, Barrie said:

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"Barrie does not talk much about his work. I asked him one night if he had any manuscript that I might have. He replied that he never saved them.

"Surely," I said, "you must have some- thing." He must be the devil, running through a great mass of papers and dug out the complete manuscript of his play "Half an Hour," written in ink on narrow sheets of paper. He gave this to me. I asked him who was the fortunate possessor of the manuscript of 'Peter Pan,' and he said that Madeleine Adams had it.

"I have said that Barrie was saddened. The chief reason for this is the affair of the war which the war has had on all thinking men in England. But Barrie has also had personal contact with the war. He went out to his hospital in France, and what he sees there inflicts new wounds on his tender heart. The boy for whom he wrote 'Peter Pan'—the original, in- deed, of 'Peter Pan'—this poor boy. This was the little boy who, through the kindly intervention of Charles Frohman, was a special performance of 'Peter Pan' in his bed. I think this is why Barrie was so miserable during the play its first London performance."

"Speaking of 'Peter Pan' I learned something else of interest in connection with that immortal play. Barrie told me with great feeling. It was the origin of the name Wendy, the Little Mother of the play. William Birnie Haven was a close friend of Barrie. The only portraits one notices in the Barrie study are those

continued Mr. Marcuson. "Indeed, I found that Frohman's memory today is cherished more in England than in the United States. There is a memorial foundation for him at Marlow-on-Thames, the sleepy little English town where he loved so well. In England, Charles Frohman has become a tradition and that he will always live. In the United States he will be only a name and in the public mind disappear. When the first of the Broadway events be he is likely to be for- gotten.

"Barrie, with his queer little cap and his eternal big black pipes, has an exten- sive place in the affections of the English people. I was interested to find how greatly he was admired by Anne Al- len, whose book, 'A Kentucky Cardinal,' is one of his American favorites. It is worth while saying, too, that in the group of active contemporary English authors, at least, Arnold Bennett, and others with whom I came in contact—there is great inter- est in the American writers. They ac- claim Allen as a great natural realist, and they look upon Theodore Dreiser as a great realist, too. With these men and others there is untempered admiration for that late David Graham Phillips, whom they regard as the fresh and unaf- afraid chronicler of modern American life. They feel that if Phillips lived to realize his full destiny he would have become the greatest American novelist.

"One day I asked Barrie how he first met Miss Allen. He told me that she had one of the closest friendships of his life and in whose memory he wrote a little classic. In reply he told me an interest- ing story, which has never, so far as I know, appeared in print. He said:

"I was a reporter on a New York newspaper when I was a young man, and one day I resigned and came to London to make my fortune by writing. I had already visited George Meredith, and the first article I ever sold was an essay on his work. With the money I received for it I first paid my room rent and then went to Buchan to see Meredith.

"I bid behind a bush on the grounds of Meredith's house. He did not know me and I left my card, and if he would have seen it he would have known that I was the great novelist being wheeled out in his big chair for his afternoon amusing. His chauffeur told me he was away on business of my late uncle, and he wheedled me stuck helplessly to kid me down. I mean I somehow face to face with the man I adored. Thus began one of the most affectionate friendships of my life. After this I often visited Meredith and he made me a manuscript nearly everything that he wrote.

"Mr. Marcuson showed me an interesting fragment of Meredith and Barrie talking together many years ago. 'Perhaps no one has been more popular,' the critic seemed to say, 'for Barrie to accept a title. But not as a matter of fact it's acceptance implied as complete and final. It did not change him in the least, and now we see him no different from his old self. To his old friends he is always just Barrie.'"