

ECHOES OF THE WAR RESOURCE PACK
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INTRODUCTION

As everyone knows, 2018 marks the centenary of the end of the First World War. Perhaps fewer people are aware that it also marks the centenary of the publication of four of J.M.Barrie's one act 'war' plays collectively known as 'Echoes of the War.'

It is worth noting that the 'Echoes' plays were all written (though not all performed) during the war years. They have seldom been performed since in the UK, though more recently they have been revived at various times and in various combinations in America.

While he was already a well known writer of short stories and novels, Barrie's playwriting career took off in 1892 with *Walker, London*; notable also as the production where he met his wife, actress Mary Ansell. They married in 1894 but divorced, childless in 1909. Another significant theatrical relationship was made in the 1890s when American theatrical producer Charles Frohman began championing Barrie's plays.

It was Frohman who took a chance on *Peter Pan* when no one else would touch it. He was still alive at the time of the opening of *The New Word*, but was killed with the sinking of the *Lusitania* in May 1915.

After Frohman's death Barrie wrote:

I had only one quarrel with him, but it lasted all the sixteen years I knew him. He wanted me to be a playwright and I wanted to be a novelist. All those years I fought him on that. He always won, but not because of his doggedness; only because he was so lovable that one had to do as he wanted. He also threatened, if I stopped, to reproduce the old plays and print my name in large electric letters over the entrance of the theatre.'

Barrie's approach to the theatre was always very 'hands on.' He would re-write constantly and the idea of a definitive version of a Barrie play is anathema. In this respect Barrie truly embraced the fragile ephemerality of the theatrical experience - but this does not mean that his plays themselves are trivial or ephemeral in theme and content.

While the 'Echoes' plays may seem out of place with his more well-known plays, closer inspection reveals that these war plays in many respects deal with familiar Barrie themes; social class, regret, fantasy versus reality and challenging established norms.

Barrie wrote numerous plays as contributions to the British war effort during the Great War some of which have a connection to the war and others that do not. This resource pack deals primarily with the four one act 'Echoes' plays; *The New Word*, *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals*, *A Well- Remembered Voice*, and *Barbara's Wedding*, as well as *Der Tag*, (his shortest propaganda piece from 1914) though the reader should be aware that plays such as *A Kiss for Cinderella*, and *Dear Brutus*, also date from this time.

Through the 'Echoes' plays Barrie offers a unique perspective on the war and it

is hoped that groups may feel inspired to put on some or all of them during this centenary year as part of an act of commemoration of the Great War. We have our own 'echoes' and I think that with a century of hindsight, Barrie's plays have as much, if not more to offer than they did when originally penned and staged.

It is in this spirit that the 'Echoes of the War Resource Pack' has been compiled and made available free to all as a downloadable document. All we ask is that you please acknowledge the J.M.Barrie Literary Society in any performance/production/reading of the plays and that you consider joining the J.M.Barrie Literary Society either as an individual or affiliate group member, during 2018. The Society exists with the aim of promoting the works of J.M.Barrie beyond his most famous work Peter Pan, and advocating for the fact that he was a writer and playwright of note for adults as well as children.

Production/Publication history

Der Tag was first produced on Dec 21st 1914

The New Word was first produced on March 22nd 1915

The Old Lady Shows Her Medals was first produced on April 7th 1917

A Well Remembered Voice was first produced on June 28th 1918

Barbara's Wedding was first produced on August 23rd 1927.

'Echoes of the War' was first published in 1918 comprising, *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals*, *The New Word*, *Barbara's Wedding* and *A Well Remembered Voice*.

Barrie scholar Jenna Kubly notes: *'In his plays, Barrie staged the war in a manner that neither sentimentalized nor sanitized it, yet despite his darker themes of disillusion and unchangeable destiny, he also portrayed wartime Britain with a humor and charm that enabled audiences to enjoy his plays. It is only with the benefit of distance and hindsight that one is fully able to appreciate the truthfulness, and yet compassion, with which Barrie portrayed the Great War.'*

We hope you will enjoy reading these plays and will be inspired to share them in whatever form possible during and beyond 2018.

For more information about J.M.Barrie Literary Society visit the website www.j.m.barriesociety.co.uk To find new Society editions of Barrie's lesser known works please visit the Barrie Collection at the [unco online bookstore](#)

The Context of the Plays

We assume that readers/potential actors and producers do not need background about the context of the First World War. This is readily available in any number of places. Our contextualisation is more specific to Barrie and his plays. These plays, written between 1914-1918, both reflect and comment on British society during the Great War.

With the outbreak of the First World War, perhaps inevitably there was a debate over whether theatre should actually continue. Those against suggested it was too trivial or perhaps a waste of resources during such a time; while those for it understood both the propaganda potential as well as the need for entertainment for those on the home front. At the time theatre was one of the most popular forms of entertainment, and when the war began there was an upsurge in attendance. With the scarcity of supplies and luxury items, entertainment was one of the few places people could spend their surplus income. Both working and middle class audiences attended the theatre. Barrie could appeal to both audiences.

However, with the exception of the musical revue, *Rosy Rapture* (1915) Barrie's work did not appear in the music halls and cinemas at this time. Rather, his work was found on the 'legitimate' stage, in West End theatres. His audiences were generally the middle and upper classes. The cost of a seat in the West End was usually at least double that of the music hall or cinema. In 1916 an Amusement Tax was brought in which added a surcharge to ticket prices. Despite this, and the fears of Zeppelin raids, it was noted by a contemporary that there were more people in search of entertainment during the war than there were theatres to accommodate them.

While generally playing for middle class audiences, Barrie's subject matter in the 'Echoes' plays looks at the war from the perspective of all classes. We should remember that there was a sense in which everyone was 'invested' in the war, it was a personal thing which touched every family - and Barrie exploited this to explore class related issues in his 'Echoes' plays.

Kubly notes: *'despite the ever present fear of bomb raids or the sentiment expressed by some that such popular entertainment showed unpatriotic sentiment - instead, theatre became a vehicle in which playwrights expressed their patriotism, such as writing plays to be performed at the popular charity matinee performances. Most of these plays, however, had little literary merit and were primarily vehicles of patriotic sentiment or escapist drama. These dramas were not an attempt to document the changing attitudes or criticisms of the war. The voices of the major dramatists of the pre-war years, such as Shaw and Pinero, had for the most part, fallen silent. Unlike Shaw or Pinero, however, Barrie wrote steadily throughout the war... His plays explore the changing attitudes of Britain and the British people, and through this exploration, one gains the sense of an inexorability of humanity's destiny during and after the Great War. In reading his plays together, one acquires a unique perspective on the Great War.'*

We should remember that during Barrie's lifetime he was one of the country's leading playwrights. He was not only popular with the public, but also highly respected by other theatre practitioners and writers. He was able to attract leading actors and producers of his day to work on his plays including: Irene Vanbrugh, Maude Adams, Fay Compton, Gerald Du Maurier, Helen Hayes, Ellen Terry, Hilda Trevelyan, J. L. Toole, Sir Henry Irving, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, Lillah McCarthy, Charles Frohman, and Sir Beerbohm Tree. Barrie was also friends with, and very much admired by, other prominent literary figures such as: George Bernard Shaw, John Galsworthy, Thomas Hardy, Granville Barker, Arthur Wing Pinero, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, H. G. Wells, G. K. Chesterton, Robert Louis Stevenson, George Meredith, S.R.Crockett and J. B. Priestley.

Barrie was already immensely rich before the war and he was incredibly philanthropic during it. He continually gave and helped raise money for the war effort. He supported many hospitals and other causes. Today we are well aware of his generosity to Great Ormond Street Hospital. It was a gesture which, like many of his gestures has seen him either misunderstood or somehow hoist with his own petard - because of the GOSH legacy *Peter Pan* has come to eclipse almost all his other work - and also to put his other extensive philanthropic work (during the war and beyond) into the shadows. We should bear in mind that despite its ongoing popular success, it is just one string in Barrie's virtuoso bow.

A review of Barrie's plays by William Phelps in *The North American Review* of 1920 offers some insight into the reception of the 'Echoes' plays during his lifetime. Phelps notes:

'Our author has the distinction of having written the worst and the best war-play. I refer to Der Tag and to The Old Lady Shows Her Medals. The greatest play produced by the war is The Old Lady Shows Her Medals. It is a tragedy, as every war-play should be. Just as he takes the ordinary themes of the theatre in times of peace, and creates something permanent and beautiful, so he takes the universal theme of the war, and shows how its tragedy reaches down into the humblest lives. No Oxford or Cambridge here; we have only charwomen, who preserve social distinctions with more rigidity than prevails in Mayfair. (A favourite theme with Barrie; remember Crichton below stairs: 'The last persons who will ever accept democracy are the servants.')

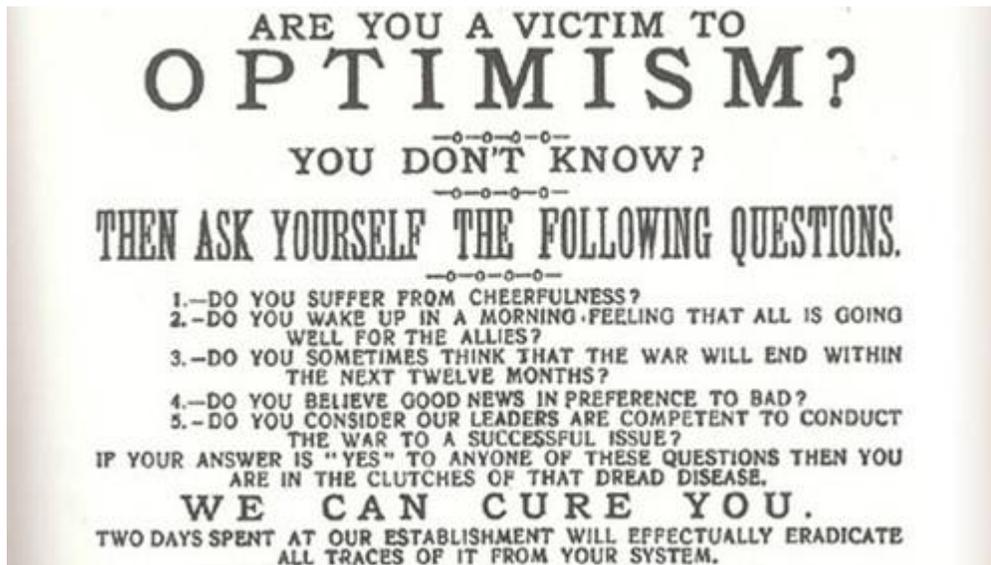
You will be able to judge for yourself in this resource pack whether *Der Tag* really is the worst (or indeed *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals* the best) war play written. *Der Tag* is not one of the 'Echoes' plays but we have included it in this resource pack not only because it was the immediate precursor to these plays, but also because it offers some insight into the complexities and confusions critics and audiences alike have dealt with when considering Barrie's plays.

Humour

Of course war is a serious business. But we should also remember that humour is a vital part of the human condition and an important weapon in the armoury of a nation at war. Barrie is often considered as the master of the light hearted, comic play; but in the 'Echoes' plays (as elsewhere) he uses humour to good effect sometimes to mask, and sometime to throw into relief, much more serious issues.

Kubly notes: *'Despite the plays' engagement with themes of disillusion and unchangeable destiny, they also portrayed wartime Britain with a humour and charm.'*

Barrie was not alone in employing humour during the war years. 'The Wipers Times', a trench magazine produced by soldiers on the front between 1916 and 1918 used to revel in such spoof adverts as this below:



It can be hard for us to see the humour in the times, but with Barrie's 'Echoes' it is possible to reach back into the lived reality of those who lived (and lost their lives) during the First World War.

Contemporary impact and reception

Jenny Kubly points out: *'Barrie observed the movement of the war, which swept the British people along, as it trampled societal conventions and reshaped Europe. Through a portrayal of the war involving different strata of British society, Barrie underscored the recurring themes of sacrifice, patriotism, anti-German sentiment, and the breakdown of class structure in relation to the war in his plays. There are*

several moments in his war plays where his fantastical visions of the future have since been fulfilled with eerie accuracy. Barrie also saw the fundamental nature of humans, and sensed the impossibility for sufficient, lasting, and real change-hence he perceived the inevitability of another great war.'

She continues:

'The plays Barrie wrote during the Great War are important because they represent perhaps one of the few extensive collections of plays in English written during WWI that attempt to capture the changing mood of Britain during these crucial years. In his plays, Barrie staged the war in a manner that not necessarily sentimentalized nor sanitized it, yet despite his darker themes of disillusion and unchangeable destiny, he also portrayed wartime Britain with a humor and charm that enabled audiences to enjoy his plays. It is only with the benefit of distance and hindsight that one is fully able to appreciate the truthfulness, and yet compassion, with which Barrie portrayed the Great War.'

It should be noted that Barrie was one of the few recognised playwrights who continued to write new works throughout the First World War.

As a contemporary reviewer noted: *'It is not an easy thing to write a play for wartime audiences. Before the war for instance, Bernard Shaw could amuse [...] But with the advent of national service and active patriotism, his comic recipe fails. On the other hand, Sir James Barrie [...] so emphatically succeeds that the public cries for more.'*

In the 'Echoes' plays Barrie presents a narrative of wartime Britain. He begins the collection with one family sending their son off to war and ends it with another family that must come to terms with loss and awareness of changing times.

While each play deals with a different family, collectively they offer a universality in the sense of an 'every' family, peopled by realistic characters.

Generally the theatricals that dealt with war tended to be melodramas or hastily written patriotic dramas. They romanticised and sanitised war with predictable plots and characters. Barrie's dramas, however, explored further. He explored the shifting attitudes of Britain to the war, emphasising recurring themes of sacrifice, patriotism and the breakdown of the class structure. In the process he portrayed a range of reactions to the war - from distrust of Germans to realism about the war and its effects on families.

Historian and critic Christopher Innes wrote:

'In Barrie's hands the one act play could explore as a single situation, emotion or character in depth, exploiting the close focus.'

Innes further notes that Barrie's short plays reached a far broader public than he could with his longer plays.

In his 'Echoes' plays Barrie considers the manner in which war intrudes on the lives of the characters as well as universalising the themes of the difficulties found in parent-child relationships which might be resolved through a crisis such as war.

Class consciousness

In his famous popular plays such as *Admirable Crichton*, *Quality Street*, *What Every Woman Wants* Barrie subtly engages with class politics and the 'Echoes' plays have a similar element.

Two of the 'Echoes' plays are 'of' the middle class, (*The New Word* and *A Well Remembered Voice*), while *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals* is of the working class and *Barbara's Wedding* of the gentry/aristocracy.

Kubly notes that: *'By relating the story of the war through the narratives of members of different social strata, Barrie understands the reality that war did not belong to any one class.'*

In the years surrounding the war, there was a period of flux in social class. Placing Barrie's writing into that context is vital if we are to understand it. We are looking at a time when middle class people kept servants, when women didn't have the vote. Socialism was 'new' and Communism and Fascism didn't exist in any practical sense. There is politics and social commentary in Barrie's work – but we have to beware as much of retro-fitting as we do of finding them 'irrelevant' today. Hindsight is a wonderful thing but it does not offer 20:20 vision. These plays offer a view of times past – but in their own day they were contemporary reality.

It was left to the war poets to find the pity in the poetry. In Barrie's war plays we do not find pity per se. What we do find, I contend, is a truthful and keen observation of the people caught up in the war.

In *Der Tag* we get the sense that we are watching a car crash in slow motion. There is a sense of helpless inevitability which perhaps connects us across the centuries. We are often led to believe that Barrie struggled creatively after *Peter Pan*. That is the 'echo.' The truth, as always, is more complex.

Even before the war, in plays from *What Every Woman Knows* to *The Twelve Pound Look* we can find an incredible range from humour to cynicism – but we should remember we read as echoes. The echoes are ours. And Barrie is deliberately a slippery, elusive character (I pick my words carefully). We should never forget that he is as adept at playing with his reader (emotionally and intellectually) as he is at playing to his audience.

Barrie's work did become much darker as the years wore on and war took its inevitable pound of flesh on him personally and professionally. He was not alone. The death of a generation touched Barrie and Kipling and a whole host of other literary figures, just as it touched the 'ordinary' folk.

In general, we find that in the 'Echoes' plays Barrie shows an insight into social class, social mores and a subtle, sophisticated awareness of the human condition.

In *New Words* we get a clear picture of how unprepared and unaware the British were to face this war. *The Old Lady Shows her Medals* gives us a keen insight into the real lived experience of the working classes during the war, where *A Well Remembered Voice* is the most poignant of dramas about loss. *Barbara's*

Wedding offers a different echo, no less grave, contextualising the war from before to after. All are worth reading, especially this year, as we reflect on the ending of the Great War Centenary and move on, ourselves to other European issues.

I hope that you are now more able to contextualise the plays and appreciate quite how significant they were both in their own time and, to us today, as 'Echoes'. When we say each year 'we will remember them' we should be aware that there are many forms of remembrance, and I believe that revisiting and re-staging such plays is a valid and important act of remembrance. This resource pack hopes to offer you key resources to make such an act of remembrance a reality for your own community.

THE PLAYS

DER TAG

COMMENTARY

When the First World War broke out, Barrie was in London for the dress rehearsal of a revival of *The Little Minister* at the Duke of York's Theatre. He was called to Buckingham Gate by Rt Hon C.F.G. Masterman (Chancellor of Duchy of Lancaster) with a number of other authors including Hardy, Galsworthy, H.G.Wells and Arnold Bennett. The plan was to organise writers for the literary dissemination of the British point of view. In other words, they were tasked to write war propaganda.

Barrie soon went to the US with his long-time friend Gilmour, possibly in an attempt to get America to join in the war. It was an abortive mission because America confirmed neutrality while he was on the boat journey. To save face (not just his own) Barrie told the media his visit was simply a private one. He did the rounds of plays on Broadway and caught up with his friend and promoter Frohman, soon himself to become a war casualty.

J.M.B was never going to be a spy or ambassador for the British war efforts. But was he an effective propagandist? While some of his contemporaries tried, and failed, to write propagandistic fare (and some didn't try at all), Barrie's first war play *Der Tag* opened just before Christmas 1914 at the Coliseum. Barrie biographer Mackail notes that even at the time people were confused by it. 'Times Literary Supplement' critic Walkley wrote: *'the popularity of Der Tag will be greatest in the study.'* He found the play confusing as to the playwrights intention saying:

'Though the intention of Der Tag is not always apparent, and though its brevity has tended to make for a certain incoherence, there are some things about this little play which make its presentation an extremely interesting event.'

Confusion of intent is to some degree Barrie's deliberate choice of stock in trade, nor should we suggest it is a failing of the playwright, but rather a mark of his skill. However simply delivered, Barrie's plays are never simple in theme or intent.

Contemporary reviews for *Der Tag* were mixed. 'The Daily Chronicle' reviewer wrote:

'The play is a tract which puts into symbolic form the thoughts and anger of hundred and thousands of the men and women all the world over. [...] The play is quite unpretentious and it is sincere, and the occasion that brought it forth is so momentous that criticism would be out of place. If not a great masterpiece, it has a fine moment and is in no way unworthy of its subject.'

While another review from 'The Manchester Guardian' suggests:

'The hammerstroke of controversy is rather outside the reach of his genius, which ever seeks for some elvish outlet into fancy, or hovers like a will-o'-the-wisp round some emotion, changing it into something new and strange. One feels that a coarser mind would have done it better. The playlet is a credit to his patriotic passions, but hardly to his art.'

But concludes on a more positive note:

'The strength of this play is in the way in which it lights up the tragic conflict in the Emperor's mind. But on the stage the pistol does not go off.'

The contemporary reader should know that *Der Tag*, (translation 'The Day') was the toast of the German army and navy, and the title reflects the appreciation that the spirit of hail fellow well met was pervasive not just in Germany but in Britain as the First World War began.

Barrie perhaps shoots wide for his contemporary audience when he tries to rouse Britain by showing her current perceived (and actual) failings. It is something of a blunt tool. But for those of us appreciating the play in 'the study' we can see it as insightful. Patriotism has many faces. Barrie uses many facets in his writing. Even in this slight piece we can fathom depths, if we are brave enough to accept the challenge.

The play opens with the German Emperor and his Chancellor and Officer in dialogue as the Emperor is about to sign a document which will make Germany at war with France and Russia. Convinced that Britain will not join as enemy and once they've got rid of France and Russia they can move in on Britain they describe Britain as a spent power,

Chancellor: I vouch for it. So well we've chosen our time, it finds her at issue with herself, her wild women let loose, her colonies ready to turn against her, Ireland aflame, the paltry British Army sulking with the civic powers.

This was clearly designed to wind up the British into a fervour of patriotism.

Emperor: Yes, that's the German truth. Britain has grown dull and sluggish... Britain's part in the world's making is done. "I was," her epitaph.

This perhaps was not the message the British wanted to hear in December 1914.

The triumphalism and dark side of imperialism is shown in the Emperor's soliloquy:

Emperor: Even a King's life is but a day, and in his day the sun is only at its zenith once...

There are shades of Shakespeare's *Henry V* in this speech. Barrie knows his

Shakespeare. But he is also Barrie. He has a toolbox all his own.

After this soliloquy The Emperor is confronted by Culture, seen here as both feminist and internationalist. She chides him:

Culture: Culture spreads not by way of maiming freedom. I'll not have you say you fight for me. Find some other reason.

Using Culture as a character is like pitting a Greek Chorus up against a Shakespearean hero. It's classic Barrie – a supposedly simple play underscored by something much more complex. It has a universality about it too. As the play progresses, in the vacillation of the Emperor I see shades of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The Emperor cannot make up his mind which will make him greater, war or peace. He commits to war but dreams of peace. And dreams, as echoes, will be a feature of many of Barrie's later plays. We are also shown in no uncertain terms that the Emperor is a man whose fate is settled by powers greater than himself.

There are no answers in this play. Despite Culture's best efforts, the die is cast and peace can only be a dream. This perhaps suggests a realisation (at least from Barrie) that 'war is inevitable'.

Written in the early days of the war, while there was still a hope that it would 'be over by Christmas,' the sorrow, followed by the horror, followed by the pity, followed by the echoes of war still stretched into an uncertain future. With the benefit of reflection, I find it powerful that Barrie uses Culture to act as a conscience – and reveals it as one of the first casualties of war.

Culture observes that Britain has been made great by the very act of war-making from Germany. But the other side of the coin is that war has destroyed culture:

Culture: I have come with this gaping wound in my breast to bid you farewell.

With the benefit of another war and a century of hindsight, we are all well-schooled in how naïvely everyone faced the start of the First World War. Barrie's war plays, including *Der Tag*, are passed down as echoes of perspectives of a world that has changed. Barrie both endured, lived through, and recorded that change. And was, himself, changed by it.

Der Tag can, and perhaps only should be seen as a prologue for what was to come. Barrie should not be condemned for its lack of subtlety or awareness simply because at the time he wrote it there were no echoes to hear. His other works are filled with the echoes that reverberate down to us today.

Reconsidering *Der Tag* I wonder what people looking back a century from now will say about the Europe of 2018/9. We are equally helpless. We have our own car crash. Our '*Der Tag*' is Brexit. I find something profoundly sad about the fact that our legacy will be a shift away from Europe as the death throes of imperialism ring hollow. Our war is an economic one. And culture – well, in my opinion, culture is

still a casualty.

Barrie's war plays still echo relevance. Treated with the respect and intelligence they deserve, they still have much to offer. In 2018 it's a shame we have so few opportunities to encounter them outside 'the study.' This resource pack offers you the opportunity to do something about that. Will you rise to the challenge?

DER TAG (THE TRAGIC MAN)

Performed Dec 21st, 1914

CHARACTERS

Emperor
Chancellor
Officer
Spirit of Culture

A bare chamber lighted by a penny dip which casts shadows. On a hard chair by a table sits an Emperor in thought. To him come his Chancellor and an Officer.

Chancellor: Your Imperial Majesty ----

Officer: Sire ----

Emperor: (the Emperor rises). Is that the paper?

(Indicating a paper in the Chancellor's hand.)

Chancellor: (presenting it). It awaits only your Imperial Majesty's signature.

Officer: When you have signed that paper, Sire, the Fatherland will be at war with France and Russia.

Emperor: At last, this little paper...

Chancellor: Not of the value of a bird's feather until it has your royal signature. The...

Emperor: Then it will sing round the planet. The vibration of it will not pass in a hundred years. My friend, how still the world has grown since I raised this pen! All Europe's listening. Europe! That's Germany, when I have signed! And yet ----

Officer: Your Imperial Majesty is not afraid to sign?

Emperor:(flashing). Afraid!

Officer: (abject). Oh, Sire!

Emperor: I am irresistible today! "Red blood boils in my veins. To me every open door is the gift of a world! I hear a thousand nightingales! I would eat all the elephants in Hindustan and pick my teeth with the spire of Strassburg Cathedral."

Officer: That is the Fatherland today. Such as we are, that you have made us, each seeking to copy you in so far as man can repeat his deity. It was you fashioned us into a sword, Sire, and now the sword must speak.

Emperor: (approvingly). There the sword spoke -- and yet the wise one said: "Take not your enemies together, but separately, lest the meal go to them instead of to you." One at a time. (To Chancellor) Why am I not a friend of Russia till France is out of the way, or France's friend until the bear is muzzled? That was your part.

Chancellor: For that I strove, but their mean minds suspected me. Sire, your signature!

Emperor: What of Britain?

Officer: (intently). This -- The Day, to which we have so often drunk, draws near!

Emperor: The Day! To The Day! (All salute The Day with their swords.) But when?

Officer: Now, if she wants it!

Emperor: There is no road to Britain -- until our neighbours are subdued. Then, for us, there will be no roads that do not lead to Britain.

Chancellor: (suavely). Your Imperial Majesty, Britain will not join in just now.

Emperor: If I was sure of that!

Chancellor: I vouch for it. So well we've chosen our time, it finds her at issue with herself, her wild women let loose, her colonies ready to turn against her, Ireland aflame, the paltry British Army sulking with the civic powers.

Emperor: These wounds might heal suddenly if German bugles sounded. It is a land that in the past has done things.

Officer: In the past, your Imperial Majesty, but in the past alone lies Britain's greatness.

Emperor: Yes, that's the German truth. Britain has grown dull and sluggish; a belly of a land, she lies overfed; no dreams within her such as keep powers alive -- and timid, too -- without red blood in her, but in its stead a thick, yellowish fluid. The most she'll play for is her own safety. Pretend to grant her that and she'll seek her soft bed again. Britain's part in the world's making is done. "I was," her epitaph.

Chancellor: How well you know her, Sire! All she needs is some small excuse for

saying, "I acted in the best interests of my money-bags." That excuse I've found for her. I have promised in your name a secret compact with her, that if she stands aloof the parts of France we do not at present need we will not at present take.

Emperor: A secret bargain over the head of France, her friend! Surely an infamous proposal.

Chancellor: The British Government will not think so. Trust me to know them, Sire. Your signature?

Emperor: (gleaming). I can fling a million men within the week across the border by way of Alsace and Lorraine.

Officer: (with a frown). There are a hundred gates to open that way.

Emperor: My guns shall open them.

Officer: (with meaning). You can think of no easier road, Sire?

Emperor: I think of it night and day.

Officer: One further north -- through Belgium?

Emperor. If I could dare! But no, that road is barred.

Officer: (misunderstanding). On the contrary, Sire ----

Emperor: Barred by a fortress no gun of mine may bear against -- by honour, by my plighted word.

Officer: Yet, Sire ----

Emperor: (after hesitating). No, no! I will not so stain my name.

Chancellor: I am with you, Sire, but I fear it will not be so with France. She has grown cynical. She will find the road through Belgium.

Emperor: You seek to tempt me. She also signed the treaty.

Chancellor: Your Imperial Majesty judges others by yourself. I have private ground for fearing that in the greed for a first advantage France will call the treaty but a scrap of paper.

Emperor: I think your private ground may be your own private newspaper.

Chancellor: She will say that necessity knows no law, or some such dastard words.

Emperor: Belgium is no craven. She will fight the betrayer.

Chancellor: France will hack her way through her.

Emperor: My Chancellor, that is a hideous phrase.

Chancellor: I ask your pardon, Sire. It came, somehow, pat to my lips.

Officer: Your Imperial Majesty, the time passes. Will it please you to sign?

Chancellor: Bonaparte would have acted quickly.

Emperor: Bonaparte!

Chancellor: The paper, Sire.

Emperor: Leave it now with me. Return in an hour and you shall have it signed.

Officer :(warningly). The least delay ----

Chancellor: Overmuch reflection ----

Emperor: I wish to be alone.

(They retire respectfully, but anxious. He is left alone in thought.)

Emperor: Even a King's life is but a day, and in his day the sun is only at its zenith once. This is my zenith; others will come to Germany, but not to me. The world pivots on me tonight. They said Bonaparte, coupling me with him. To dim Napoleon! Paris in three weeks -- say four, to cover any chance miscalculation; Russia on her back in six, with Poland snapping at her, and then, after a breathing space, we reach -- The Day! We sweep the English Channel, changing its name as we embark, and cross by way of Calais, which will have fallen easily into our hands, the British fleet destroyed -- for that is part of the plan -- Dover to London is a week of leisured marching, and London itself, unfortified and panic-stricken, falls in a day! Væ victis! I'll leave conquered Britain some balls to play with, so that there shall be no uprising. Next I carve America in great mouthfuls for my colonists, for now I strike the seas. It's all so docketed. I feel it's as good as done before I set forth to do it. Dictator of the world! And all for pacific ends. For once, the whole is mine. We come

at last to the great desideratum, a universal peace. Rulers over all! God in the heavens, I upon the earth -- we two! (Raising his brows threateningly) And there are still the Zeppelins! I'll sign!

(He sits in thought. He is very tired, and soon he is asleep. The lighting becomes strange; he dreams, and we see his dream. The Spirit of Culture appears, a noble female figure in white robes.)

Emperor: Who's that?

Culture: A friend. I am Culture, who has so long hovered well-placed over happy Germany.

Emperor: (who gives her royal honour). A friend -- a consort! I would hear you say, O Queen, that I have done some things for you.

Culture: You have done much for me. I have held my head higher since you were added to the roll of sovereigns. I may have smiled at you at times, as when you seemed to think that you were the two of us in one, but as Kings go you have been a worthy King.

Emperor: It was all done for you.

Culture: So, for long, I thought. I looked upon Germany's golden granaries, plucked from ground once barren; its busy mills and furnaces, its outstretching commerce and teeming people and noble seats of learning, all mellowing in the sun, and I heard you say they were dedicate to me, and I was proud. You have honoured me, my Emperor, and now I am here to be abased by you. All the sweet garments you have robed me in, tear them off me and send me naked out of Germany.

Emperor: You would not have me sign?

Culture: I warn you first to know yourself, you who have gloated in a looking-glass too long.

Emperor: I sign, so that Germany may be greater still, to spread your banner farther; thus I make the whole world cultured.

Culture: My banner needs no such spreading. It has ever been your weakness to think that I have no other home save here in Germany. I have many homes, and the fairest is in France.

Emperor: If that were true, Germany would care less for you.

Culture: If that is true, I have never had a home in Germany. I am no single nation's servant, no single race's Queen. I am not of German make. My banner is already in every land on which you would place your heel. Culture spreads not by way of maiming freedom. I'll not have you say you fight for me. Find some other reason.

Emperor: The jealousies of nations ----

Culture: All are guilty there. Jealousy, not love of money, is the root of all evil; that was a misprint. Yet I know of nothing those others want that is yours to give, save peace. What do you want of them? Bites out of each, and when they refuse to be dismembered you cry: "The blood be on their heads; they force me into war."

Emperor: Germany must expand. That is her divine mission; I have it from on high.

Culture: Your system of espionage is known to be tolerably complete.

Emperor: All Germany is with me. I hold in leash the mightiest machine for war the world has forged.

Culture: I have seen your legions, and all are with you. Never was a Lord more trusted. O Emperor, does that not make you pause?

Emperor: France invades little Belgium.

Culture: Chivalrous France! Never! Emperor, I leave one last word to you at the parting of the ways. France, Russia, Britain, these are great opponents, but it is not they will bring the pillars of Germany down. Beware of Belgium!

(She goes. He is left in two minds. He crosses to sign. He flings down the pen. He strikes the bell. Chancellor and Officer reappear.)

Chancellor: Your Imperial Majesty has signed?

Emperor: Thus (he tears the paper).

Officer. Sire!

Emperor: Say this to Russia, France, and Britain in my Imperial name: So long as they keep within their borders I remain in mine.

Officer: But, Sire ----

Emperor: You know, as I do, that it is all they ask for.

Chancellor: You were the friend of Austria.

Emperor: I'll prove it. Tell her from me that Servia has yielded on every point which doth become a nation and that Austria may accept her terms.

Chancellor: Nay, Sire ----

Emperor: And so, there will be no war.

Officer: Sire, we beg ----

Emperor: These are my commands.

(They have to go, chagrined, but deferential.)

Emperor: The decision lay with me, and I said there shall be peace. That be my zenith!

(He goes back to the chair; he sleeps peacefully; in the distance a bell tolls the Angelus, and suddenly this is broken by one boom of a great gun, which reverberates and should be startling. The Spirit of Culture returns, now with a wound in her breast; she surveys him sadly.)

Culture: Sleep on, unhappy King. (He grows restless.) Better to wake if even your dreams appal you.

(He wakes, and for a moment he scarcely understands that he has been dreaming; the realization is tragic to him.)

Emperor: You! You have come here to mock me!

Culture: Oh, no.

Emperor: I dreamed there was no war. In my dream they came to me and I forbade the war. I saw the Fatherland smiling and prosperous, as it was before the war.

Culture: It was you who made the war, O Emperor!

Emperor:(huskily). Belgium?

Culture: There is no Belgium now, but over what was Belgium there rests a soft

light, as of a helm, and through it is a flaming sword.

Emperor: I dreamed I had kept my plighted word to Belgium.

Culture: It was you, O Emperor, who broke your plighted word and laid waste the land. In the lust for victory you violated even the laws of war which men contrive so that when the sword is sheathed they may dare again face their Maker. Your way to Him is lighted now by smouldering spires and ashes that were once fair academic groves of mine, and you shall seek Him over roads cobbled with the moans of innocents.

Emperor: In my dream I thought England was grown degenerate and would not fight.

Culture: She fought you where Crécy was, and Agincourt, and Waterloo, with all their dead to help her. The dead became quick in their ancient graves, stirred by the tread of the island feet, and they cried out: "How is England doing?" The living answered the dead upon their bugles with the "All's well." England, O Emperor, was grown degenerate, but you, you, have made her great.

Emperor: France, Russia?

Culture: They are here around your walls.

Emperor: My people?

Culture: I see none marching but men whose feet make no sound. Shades of your soldiers who pass on and on, in never-ending lines.

Emperor: Do they curse me?

Culture: None curses; they all salute you as they pass. They have done your bidding.

Emperor: The women curse me?

Culture: Not even the women. They, too, salute you. You were their Father and could do no wrong.

Emperor: And you?

Culture: I have come with this gaping wound in my breast to bid you farewell.

Emperor: God cannot let my Germany be utterly destroyed.

Culture: If God is with the Allies, Germany will not be destroyed. Farewell.

(She is going. She lifts a pistol from the table and puts it in his hand. It is all she can do for her old friend. She goes away with shining eyes. The penny dip burns low. The great Emperor is lost in its shadows.)

THE NEW WORD

COMMENTARY

The New Word was the first play in Barrie's 'war quartet,' which was later published as *Echoes of the War*. The play was first performed in March 1915, produced by Charles Frohman. It opened at The Duke of York Theatre on 22nd March on the variety stage as a curtain raiser to Barrie's review *Rosy Rapture the Pride of the Chorus*. Initially it ran for seventy eight performances and was generally well received.

H.M. Walbrook wrote in his 1922 book 'J.M.Barrie and the Theatre': *The New Word, first acted at the Duke of York's before Rosy Rapture in March, 1915, was a touching little picture of an inarticulate abashed father and son bidding each other good-bye before the boy left for the Front.'*

'The Nation,' a contemporary magazine however suggested it was *'merely a trifle but "iridescent with smiles and tears. It is being enacted with variations, not only in 'any English home,' but one might almost say, in every English home.'*

The New Word was later put on in New York in 1917, also by Charles Frohman's company, in a triple bill that included two other Barrie plays, *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals* and *Old Friends* as part of the war relief effort. It was then seen as true to life in terms of characterization and plot.

Set early in the war the play looks at the effects of the war on the lives of one family (The Torrances) as a means of addressing the universal theme of familial relationships during the war. The family are a solid middle class one and the play at first appears to be a piece of pro-war propaganda.

Almost as soon as the question 'how long is the war going to last?' is framed, the play shifts focus. The play challenges the 'nobility' of the cause and looks closely at the sacrifice of families, particularly mothers, and how far one should and can trust the Government.

The play is set while national pride was still strong and the characters reveal clear anti-German sentiment throughout. However, for characters and audience alike, the cracks are beginning to show. A war that, in August 1914 was to have been over by Christmas has dragged on into 1915. At this point of course the slaughter fields of Ypres, Verdun and the Somme were still in the future but there is a palpable sense of fear for that future. There is an understanding by the parents that the sacrifice might be that of their own son. There is still a sense of romanticism however, expressed especially by Emma. From the mother's perspective, in the practical details of her packing for his journey we sense a mother acting as if she is sending her son off to school. Throughout all this, the competing concepts of adventure and sacrifice are explored.

Thus, within the superficial lightness, we already see dark depths. It is revealed that the family have already lost one son, in childhood. This seems to make the potential sacrifice of Roger even greater. Belying the pro-war propaganda we

see Barrie already turning the screw. He is clearly questioning such patriotism.

No family was untouched by the war. Barrie's own adopted sons George and Peter Llewellyn Davis became Second Lieutenants in 1914 and Jack served in the Royal Navy. It is likely that George's departure for the Western Front in December 1914 provided the creative spark for *The New Word*.

The Torrance family share the universal hope that they are fighting for a noble cause, but are beginning to question the certainty that the Government would not send so many out for a less than glorious cause. Mrs Torrance prepares to sacrifice her only son for Britain but without, we sense, any real understanding of what this means. Her lack of understanding is beyond simple words (new or old). In the relationship between Mr Torrance and his son it is all too easy to see an 'echo' of the relationship between Barrie himself and his adopted sons. Having known the family well since 1897, he took over guardianship for the Llewellyn Davis boys in 1910 on the death of their mother and saw them through the difficult teenage years.

The New Words

Barrie is clever in his conceit of exploring the whole issue through 'new' words. Ostensibly the play is concerned with the 'new' word *Second Lieutenant*, but we also see the significance of another 'new', more hidden word: *Dear* which is offered in the context of the relationship of father and son. We should also be aware that 'new' extends to the whole nature of the war. What to us is simply The Great War or The First World War, was a fundamentally 'new' type of war and in 1915 people were still coming to terms with what this actually meant.

'Second lieutenant' was the term that replaced subaltern for this 'new' war. Second lieutenant as rank created a middle ground position between the traditional aristocratic officers and the common soldiers. The men who filled this rank were drawn from the middle class. A historian noted: *'The First World War in particular was a public school war.'* Middle class men from minor public schools (and some of the major ones) who were not cut out to be Captains found themselves recruited as Second Lieutenants. These are men who would not necessarily have gone into the army as a career.

Traditionally the second son of aristocratic families would go into the army – perhaps into the cavalry. The prime requirement to be a cavalryman was ownership (and ability to pay for the upkeep) of a horse. But with new technology – machine guns – and the emergence of tanks – things changed.

The New Word is set at the time when Lord Kitchener was calling up troops and thousands of men from every walk of life flocked to enlist. They couldn't all be officers. But they wouldn't all want to be privates. Those from the likes of Eton and Cambridge were therefore commissioned as second lieutenants when they enlisted. As mentioned previously this included Barrie's own adopted son George who was killed on March 15th, a week before the first performance of *The New Word*.

The war touched just about every household in Britain and during the play

Barrie's characters reflect the home as the place to learn life lessons, including, according to Mr Torrance the art of war. The brutal reality of trench warfare is still here seen as somewhat of a fiction back from the perspective of the domestic front, which sees the war as some kind of extension of boarding school. It was all glory... the guts came later.

Roger is brought downstairs to a domestic fanfare:

'Allow me to introduce 2nd Lieutenant Torrance of the Royal Sussex. Father—your son; 2nd Lieutenant Torrance—your father. Mother—your little Rogie,'

His sister Emma announces him, before rushing over to the piano to play 'See the Conquering Hero Comes.'

We can imagine this scene being played out in households all over the country. In it we see the clash between old and 'new' versions of war especially reflected in the ensuing dialogue about the sword. Redundant for all practical purposes the cavalry sword is a vestige of both 'old' war and 'old' society.

While Barrie uses humour throughout *The New Word*, we cannot escape seeing the poignancy underneath the humour, as he forces us to look into the very nature of words. Mr Torrance teases his wife. She often misunderstands and takes his humour for sarcasm. Sarcasm is defined as using words to express the opposite of what they mean - and throughout this play Barrie shows how inadequately the characters can use words - especially to express emotion. This reflects the reality of the time where familial relationships are now seen to have been somewhat 'buttoned up' or 'stiff upper lip'. The inability of (especially) father and son to express love (but also husband and wife) goes far beyond plain humour. We sense that Barrie understands opposites - and one of the (many) strengths of his plays is his ability to lure us in with humour and then expose us to the opposite - the sadness underlying the purportedly humorous situation.

When Mrs Torrance leaves the men alone we are introduced to the second, hidden 'new' word. The play subtly shifts to consider the relationship between father and son. This is clearly awkward emotionally. While both have respect for each other, they are unable to express affection. This is reflected by the fragmented nature of their conversation. Mr Torrance finally takes the bull by the horns:

'There is a war on, Roger. [...] Be ready; I hate to hit you without warning. I'm going to cast a grenade into the middle of you. It's this, I'm fond of you, my boy.'

While this might be seen as humorous in any other situation, in context it is extremely poignant. But that is Barrie, he is never afraid to play poignancy as humour.

We should note how, throughout the play, the language of the war is significantly used in the context of everyday speech. It is revealed that Mr Torrance regrets that he is not able to fight. The war has forced him to have to come to terms with his own age and status.

'I'm a decent old fellow, but I don't really count any more,'

He feels that he is sending his son to war in his place, which affects him on a number of levels. Where the mother was prepared to sacrifice her living son, and gains a sense of status from it, the father feels that he should be offering himself as a sacrifice, and is uncomfortable with sending his son in his stead.

We have to remember that previous recent wars (Crimea, Boer) affected very few and that this Great War was something completely 'new' in type. In 1915 those at home were only starting to realise this powerful fact. Previous wars had been fought either by the aristocracy, in a tradition dating back to the medieval feudal system, or more recently in the nineteenth century, by soldiers from abroad. In the Indian Colony for example, Indian regiments comprised almost four-fifths of the British force in India. But this 'new' War was a war in which the common man could fight.

It is in this context that the second 'new' word: *Dear* is thrown into the mix. However, it is not just a 'new' word, but a whole 'new' concept under scrutiny here. With this word at the centre of the awkwardness, Roger and Mr Torrance navigate their way, with poignant humour, through the difficulty of their relationship. They are both ostensibly keen to placate Mrs Torrance - the mother being seen as the most important person in this family relationship. As audience however, we are witness to the depth and the significance of the father/son relationship (we will see this revisited in *A Well Remembered Voice*).

The two men used coded language which they know Mrs Torrance will not understand - given her misinterpretation of humour as sarcasm. But we, and the audience, can see the levels of language at play through the use of the second 'new' word.

Troubled parent-child relationships is a common theme in Barrie's plays and it certainly runs through this play. By finally saying the 'new word,' Roger brings a sense of completion to his relationship with Mr. Torrance, which only makes the ending more poignant.

Barrie Scholar Kubly summarises thus: *'Barrie captured the anxieties of the time he lived in perfectly, and put them on stage. Yet despite being written for its own age, The New Word, like Der Tag, also hints, perhaps unknowingly, at deeper implications. Whatever universality this play possesses stems from the awkward relationship between father and son, and from their attempt to learn to say "the new word," that is, their attempts to acknowledge their affection. But the "new word" is also, as stated in the play, "second lieutenant," and although Barrie himself probably intended more with the "new word" spoken between father and son, in retrospect the word "second lieutenant" has taken on a deeper poignancy all its own. The audience is not provided with an epilogue that informs them of Roger's death, a device which will be used in a later play The Old Lady Shows Her Medals, but his death is certainly implied, especially in Mrs. Torrance's lines. The deaths of thousands of second lieutenants in the Great War, represented by Roger Torrance,*

were not simply the deaths of thousands of sons across Britain. The deaths also meant that Britain lost a generation of civil servants. These young men educated at Eton and Oxford, had they not gone off to war, would have grown up to be civil servants—lawyers, barristers, clerks—in the footsteps of their parents. Roger would have probably had a legal position as his father had. Instead of going on to serve in public offices, where each would have informed and guarded the structure of British government and society in their own small way, these educated middle-class sons, became the “Oxford men, who went abroad to die.”

The New Word has a poignancy, though in isolation it might be seen as a light play. To create full impact it is perhaps best played along with *A Well Remembered Voice*. Together the plays offer a deep, insightful and often troubling picture of father/son relationships, reflecting not just Barrie’s own experience, or indeed that of his time, but something more universal. As the first real ‘Echo’ this play stands on the cusp of an inevitable and painful reality that the ‘new’ war was about to become even harder and even more personal for Barrie (and many others) as we will see in the other ‘Echoes’ Plays. The play on words and the playing with words it contains offers an insight into the depths Barrie could plumb even in supposedly light, popular drama.

THE NEW WORD

Cast:

Mr John Torrance, late 40s

Mrs Ellen Torrance (his wife) late 40s

Roger Torrance (19)

Emma Torrance (17)

Any room nowadays must be the scene, for any father and any son are the *dramatis personae*. We could pick them up in Mayfair, in Tooting, on the Veldt, in rectories or in grocers' back parlours, dump them down on our toy stage and tell them to begin. It is a great gathering to choose from, but our needs are small. Let the company shake hands, and all go away but two.

The two who have remained (it is discovered on inquiry) are Mr. Torrance and his boy; so let us make use of them. Torrance did not linger in order to be chosen, he was anxious, like all of them, to be off; but we recognised him, and sternly signed to him to stay. Not that we knew him personally, but the fact is, we remembered him (we never forget a face) as the legal person who reads out the names of the jury before the court opens, and who brushes aside your reasons for wanting to be let off. It pleases our humour to tell Mr. Torrance that we cannot let him off.

He does not look so formidable as when last we saw him, and this is perhaps owing to our no longer being hunched with others on those unfeeling benches. It is not because he is without a wig, for we saw him, on the occasion to which we are so guardedly referring, both in a wig and out of it; he passed behind a screen without it, and immediately (as quickly as we write) popped out in it, giving it a finishing touch rather like the butler's wriggle to his coat as he goes to the door. There are the two kinds of learned brothers, those who use the screen, and those who (so far as the jury knows) sleep in their wigs. The latter are the swells, and include the judges; whom, however, we have seen in the public thoroughfares without their wigs, a horrible sight that has doubtless led many an onlooker to crime.

Mr. Torrance, then, is no great luminary; indeed, when we accompany him to his house, as we must, in order to set our scene properly, we find that it is quite a suburban affair, only one servant kept, and her niece engaged twice a week to crawl about the floors. There is no fire in the drawing-room, so the family remain on after dinner in the dining-room, which rather gives them away. There is really no one in the room but Roger. That is the truth of it, though to the unseeing eye all the family are there except Roger. They consist of Mr., Mrs., and Miss Torrance. Mr. Torrance is enjoying his evening paper and a cigar, and every line of him is insisting stubbornly that nothing unusual is happening in the house. In the home circle (and now that we think of it, even in court) he has the reputation of being a somewhat sarcastic gentleman; he must be dogged, too, otherwise he would have ceased long ago to be sarcastic to his wife, on whom wit falls like pellets on sandbags; all the

dents they make are dimples.

Mrs. Torrance is at present exquisitely employed; she is listening to Roger's step overhead. You, know what a delightful step the boy has. And what is more remarkable is that Emma is listening to it too, Emma who is seventeen, and who has been trying to keep Roger in his place ever since he first compelled her to bowl to him. Things have come to a pass when a sister so openly admits that she is only number two in the house.

Remarks well worthy of being recorded fall from these two ladies as they gaze upward.

ELLEN: 'I think — didn't I, Emma?' *is the mother's contribution, while it is Emma who replies in a whisper,*

EMMA: 'No, not yet!'

Mr. Torrance calmly reads, or seems to read, for it is not possible that there can be anything in the paper as good as this. Indeed, he occasionally casts a humorous glance at his women-folk. Perhaps he is trying to steady them. Let us hope he has some such good reason for breaking in from time to time on their entrancing occupation.

JOHN: 'Listen to this, dear. It is very important. The paper says, upon apparently good authority, that love laughs at locksmiths.'

ELLEN: *answers without lowering her eyes.* 'Did you speak, John? I am listening.'

JOHN: 'Yes, I was telling you that the Hidden Hand has at last been discovered in a tub in Russell Square.'

ELLEN: 'I hear, John. How thoughtful.'

JOHN: 'And so they must have been made of margarine, my love.'

ELLEN: 'I shouldn't wonder, John.'

JOHN: 'Hence the name Petrograd.'

ELLEN: 'Oh, was that the reason?'

JOHN: 'You will be pleased to hear, Ellen, that the honourable gentleman then resumed his seat.'

ELLEN: 'That was nice of him.'

JOHN: ‘As I,’ good-naturedly, ‘now resume mine, having made my usual impression.’

ELLEN: ‘Yes, John.’

Emma slips upstairs to peep through a keyhole, and it strikes her mother that John has been saying something. They are on too good terms to make an apology necessary. She observes blandly,

ELLEN: ‘John, I haven’t heard a word you said.’

JOHN: ‘I’m sure you haven’t, woman.’

ELLEN: ‘I can’t help being like this, John.’

JOHN: ‘Go on being like yourself, dear.’

ELLEN: ‘Am I foolish?’

JOHN: ‘Um.’

ELLEN: ‘Oh, but, John, how can you be so calm — with him up there?’

JOHN: ‘He has been up there a good deal, you know, since we presented him to an astounded world nineteen years ago.’

ELLEN: ‘But he — he is not going to be up there much longer, John.’ *She sits on the arm of his chair, so openly to wheedle him that it is not worth his while to smile. Her voice is tremulous; she is a woman who can conceal nothing.* ‘You will be nice to him — to-night — won’t you, John?’

Mr. Torrance is a little pained.

JOHN: ‘Do I just begin to-night, Ellen?’

ELLEN: ‘Oh no, no; but I think he is rather — shy of you at times.’

JOHN: ‘That,’ *he says a little wryly*, ‘is because he is my son, Ellen.’

ELLEN: ‘Yes — it’s strange; but — yes.’

JOHN: *With a twinkle that is not all humorous*, ‘Did it ever strike you, Ellen, that I am a bit — shy of him?’

She is indeed surprised.

ELLEN: 'Of Rogie!'

JOHN: 'I suppose it is because I am his father.'

She presumes that this is his sarcasm again, and lets it pass at that. It reminds her of what she wants to say.

ELLEN: 'You are so sarcastic,' *she has never quite got the meaning of this word*, 'to Rogie at times. Boys don't like that, John.'

JOHN: 'Is that so, Ellen?'

ELLEN: 'Of course I don't mind your being sarcastic to me—'

JOHN: 'Much good,' *groaning*, 'my being sarcastic to you! You are so seldom aware of it.'

ELLEN: 'I am not asking you to be a mother to him, John.'

JOHN: 'Thank you, my dear.'

ELLEN: *She does not know that he is sarcastic again.* 'I quite understand that a man can't think all the time about his son as a mother does.'

JOHN: 'Can't he, Ellen? What makes you so sure of that?'

ELLEN: 'I mean that a boy naturally goes to his mother with his troubles rather than to his father. Rogie tells me everything.'

JOHN: *stung*. 'I daresay he might tell me things he wouldn't tell you.'

She smiles at this. It is very probably sarcasm.

ELLEN: 'I want you to be serious just now. Why not show more warmth to him, John?'

JOHN: *With an unspoken sigh*, 'It would terrify him, Ellen. Two men show warmth to each other! Shame, woman!'

ELLEN: 'Two men!' *indignantly*. 'John, he is only nineteen.'

JOHN: 'That's all,' *patting her hand*. 'Ellen, it is the great age to be today, nineteen.'

Emma darts in.

EMMA: 'Mother, he has unlocked the door! He is taking a last look at himself in the mirror before coming down!'

Having made the great announcement, she is off again.

ELLEN: 'You won't be sarcastic, John?'

JOHN: 'I give you my word — if you promise not to break down.'

ELLEN: *Rashly*, 'I promise.' *She hurries to the door and back again*. 'John, I'll contrive to leave you and him alone together for a little.'

Mr. Torrance is as alarmed as if the judge had looked over the bench and asked where he was.

JOHN: 'For God's sake, woman, don't do that! Father and son! He'll bolt; or if he doesn't, I will.'

Emma Torrance flings open the door grandly, and we learn what all the to-do is about.

EMMA: 'Allow me to introduce 2nd Lieutenant Torrance of the Royal Sussex. Father — your son; 2nd Lieutenant Torrance — your father. Mother — your little Rogie.'

Roger, in uniform, walks in, strung up for the occasion. Or the uniform comes forward with Roger inside it. He has been a very ordinary nice boy up to now, dull at his 'books'; by an effort Mr. Torrance had sent him to an obscure boarding-school, but at sixteen it was evident that an office was the proper place for Roger. Before the war broke out he was treasurer of the local lawn tennis club, and his golf handicap was seven; he carried his little bag daily to and from the city, and his highest relaxation was giggling with girls or about them. Socially he had fallen from the standards of the home; even now that he is in his uniform the hasty might say something clever about 'temporary gentlemen.'

But there are great ideas buzzing in Roger's head, which would never have been there save for the war. At present he is chiefly conscious of his clothes. His mother embraces him with cries of rapture, while Mr. Torrance surveys him quizzically over the paper; and Emma, rushing to the piano, which is of such an old-fashioned kind that it can also be used as a sideboard, plays 'See the Conquering

Hero Comes.’

ROGER: *in an agony*, ‘Mater, do stop that chit making an ass of me.’

He must be excused for his ‘mater.’ That was the sort of school; and his mother is rather proud of the phrase, though it sometimes makes his father wince.

ELLEN: ‘Emma, please, don’t. But I’m sure you deserve it, my darling. Doesn’t he, John?’

JOHN: *missing his chance*, ‘Hardly yet, you know. Can’t be exactly a conquering hero the first night you put them on, can you, Roger?’

ROGER: *hotly*, ‘Did I say I was?’

ELLEN: ‘Oh, John! Do turn round, Rogie. I never did — I never did!’

EMMA: ‘Isn’t he a pet!’

ROGER: ‘Shut up, Emma.’

ELLEN: *challenging the world*, ‘Though I say it who shouldn’t — and yet, why shouldn’t I?’

JOHN: ‘In any case you will — so go ahead, “mater.”’

ELLEN: ‘I knew he would look splendid; but I — of course I couldn’t know that he would look quite so splendid as this.’

ROGER: ‘I know I look a bally ass. That is why I was such a time in coming down.’

JOHN: ‘We thought we heard you upstairs strutting about.’

ELLEN: ‘John! Don’t mind him, Rogie.’

ROGER: *haughtily*, ‘I don’t.’

JOHN: ‘Oh!’

ROGER: ‘But I wasn’t strutting.’

ELLEN: ‘That dreadful sword! No, I would prefer you not to draw it, dear — not till necessity makes you.’

JOHN: 'Come, come, Ellen; that's rather hard lines on the boy. If he isn't to draw it here, where is he to draw it?'

EMMA: *with pride*, 'At the Front, father.'

JOHN: 'I thought they left them at home nowadays, Roger?'

ROGER: 'Yes, mater; you see, they are a bit in the way.'

ELLEN: foolishly, 'Not when you have got used to them.'

JOHN: 'That isn't what Roger means.' (*His son glares.*)

EMMA, *who, though she has not formerly thought much of Roger, is now proud to trot by his side and will henceforth count the salutes*, 'I know what he means. If you carry a sword the snipers know you are an officer, and they try to pick you off.'

ELLEN: 'It's no wonder they are called Huns. Fancy a British sniper doing that! Roger, you will be very careful, won't you, in the trenches?'

ROGER: 'Honour bright, mater.'

ELLEN: 'Above all, don't look up.'

JOHN: 'The trenches ought to be so deep that they can't look up.'

ELLEN: 'What a good idea, John.'

ROGER: 'He's making game of you, mater.'

ELLEN: *unruffled*, 'Is he, my own? — very likely. Now about the question of provisions—'

ROGER: 'Oh, lummy, you talk as if I was going off to-night! I mayn't go for months and months.'

ELLEN: 'I know — and, of course, there is a chance that you may not be needed at all.'

ROGER: *poor boy*, 'None of that, mater.'

ELLEN: 'There is something I want to ask you, John — How long do you think the war is likely to last?' *Her John resumes his paper.* 'Rogie, I know you will laugh at

me, but there are some things that I could not help getting for you.’

ROGER: ‘You know, you have knitted enough things already to fit up my whole platoon.’

ELLEN: *proud almost to tears*, ‘His platoon.’

EMMA. ‘Have you noticed how fine all the words in -oon are? Platoon! Dragoon!’

JOHN: ‘Spittoon!’

EMMA: ‘Colonel is good, but rather papaish; Major is nose-y; Admiral of the Fleet is scrumptious, but Marechal de France — that is the best of all.’

ELLEN: ‘I think there is nothing so nice as 2nd Lieutenant.’ *Gulping*, ‘Lot of little boys.’

ROGER. ‘Mater!’

ELLEN: ‘I mean, just think of their cold feet.’ *She produces many parcels and displays their strange contents*. ‘Those are for putting inside your socks. Those are for outside your socks. I am told that it is also advisable to have straw in your boots.’

JOHN: ‘Have you got him some straw?’

ELLEN: ‘I thought, John, he could get it there. But if you think—’

ROGER: ‘He’s making fun of you again, mater.’

ELLEN: ‘I shouldn’t wonder. Here are some overalls. One is leather and one fur, and this one is waterproof. The worst of it is that they are from different shops, and each says that the others keep the damp in, or draw the feet. They have such odd names, too. There are new names for everything nowadays. Vests are called cuirasses. Are you laughing at me, Rogie?’

JOHN: sharply, ‘If he is laughing, he ought to be ashamed of himself.’

ROGER: *barking*, ‘Who was laughing?’

ELLEN: ‘John!’

Emma cuffs her father playfully.

JOHN: 'All very well, Emma, but it's past your bedtime.'

EMMA: *indignantly*, 'You can't expect me to sleep on a night like this.'

JOHN: 'You can try.'

ELLEN: '2nd Lieutenant! 2nd Lieutenant!'

JOHN: *alarmed*, 'Ellen, don't break down. You promised.'

ELLEN: 'I am not going to break down; but — but there is a photograph of Rogie when he was very small—'

JOHN: 'Go to bed!'

ELLEN: 'I happen — to have it in my pocket—'

ROGER: 'Don't bring it out, mater.'

ELLEN: 'If I break down, John, it won't be owing to the picture itself so much as because of what is written on the back.'

She produces it dolefully.

JOHN: 'Then don't look at the back.'

He takes it from her.

ELLEN: *not very hopeful of herself*, 'But I know what is written on the back, "Roger John Torrance, aged two years four months, and thirty-three pounds."'

JOHN: 'Correct.' *She weeps softly*. 'There, there, woman.' *He signs imploringly to Emma.*

EMMA: *kissing him*, 'I'm going to by-by. 'Night, mammy. 'Night, Rog.'

She is about to offer him her cheek, then salutes instead, and rushes off, with Roger in pursuit.

ELLEN: 'I shall leave you together, John.'

JOHN: *half liking it, but nervous*, 'Do you think it's wise?' *With a groan*, 'You know what I am.'

ELLEN: 'Do be nice to him, dear.' *Roger's return finds her very artful indeed, 'I wonder where I put my glasses?'*

ROGER: 'I'll look for them.'

ELLEN: 'No, I remember now. They are upstairs in such a funny place that I must go myself. Do you remember, Rogie, that I hoped they would reject you on account of your eyes?'

ROGER: 'I suppose you couldn't help it.'

ELLEN: *beaming on her husband*, 'Did you believe I really meant it, John?'

JOHN: *curious*, 'Did you, Roger?'

ROGER: 'Of course. Didn't you, father?'

JOHN: 'No! I knew the old lady better.'

He takes her hand.

ELLEN: *sweetly*, 'I shouldn't have liked it, Rogie dear. I'll tell you something. You know your brother Harry died when he was seven. To you, I suppose, it is as if he had never been. You were barely five.'

ROGER: 'I don't remember him, mater.'

ELLEN: 'No — no. But I do, Rogie. He would be twenty-one now; but though you and Emma grew up I have always gone on seeing him as just seven. Always till the war broke out. And now I see him a man of twenty-one, dressed in khaki, fighting for his country, same as you. I wouldn't have had one of you stay at home, though I had had a dozen. That is, if it is the noble war they all say it is. I'm not clever, Rogie, I have to take it on trust. Surely they wouldn't deceive mothers. I'll get my glasses.'

She goes away, leaving the father and son somewhat moved. It is Mr. Torrance who speaks first, gruffly.

JOHN: 'Like to change your mother, Roger?'

ROGER: *also gruff*. 'What do you think?'

Then silence falls. These two are very conscious of being together, without so

much as the tick of a clock to help them. The father clings to his cigar, sticks his knife into it, studies the leaf, tries crossing his legs another way. The son examines the pictures on the walls as if he had never seen them before, and is all the time edging toward the door.

Mr. Torrance wets his lips; it must be now or never,

JOHN: 'Not going, Roger?'

ROGER: *Roger counts the chairs.* 'Yes, I thought—'

JOHN: 'Won't you — sit down and — have a chat?'

ROGER; *bowled over.* 'A what? You and me!'

JOHN: 'Why not?' *rather truculently.*

ROGER; 'Oh — oh, all right,' *sitting uncomfortably.*

The cigar gets several more stabs.

JOHN: 'I suppose you catch an early train tomorrow?'

ROGER: 'The 5.20. I have flag-signalling at half-past six.'

JOHN: 'Phew! Hours before I shall be up.'

ROGER: 'I suppose so.'

JOHN: 'Well, you needn't dwell on it, Roger.'

ROGER: *Indignantly.* 'I didn't.' *He starts up.* 'Good-night, father.'

JOHN: 'Good-night. Damn. Come back. My fault. Didn't I say I wanted to have a chat with you?'

ROGER: 'I thought we had had it.'

JOHN: *Gloomingly,* 'No such luck.'

There is another pause. A frightened ember in the fire makes an appeal to some one to say something. Mr. Torrance rises. It is now he who is casting eyes at the door. He sits again, ashamed of himself.

JOHN: 'I like your uniform, Roger,' he says pleasantly.

ROGER: *wriggles*. 'Haven't you made fun of me enough?'

JOHN: *Sharply*, 'I'm not making fun of you. Don't you see I'm trying to tell you that I'm proud of you?'

Roger is at last aware of it, with a sinking. He appeals,

ROGER: 'Good lord, father, you are not going to begin now.'

The father restrains himself.

JOHN: 'Do you remember, Roger, my saying that I didn't want you to smoke till you were twenty?'

ROGER: 'Oh, it's that, is it?' *Shutting his mouth tight*, 'I never promised.'

JOHN: *Almost with a shout*, 'It's not that.' *Then kindly*, 'Have a cigar, my boy?'

ROGER: 'Me?'

A rather shaky hand, passes him a cigar case. Roger selects from it and lights up nervously. He is now prepared for the worst.

JOHN: 'Have you ever wondered, Roger, what sort of a fellow I am?'

ROGER: *Guardedly*, 'Often.'

Mr. Torrance casts all sense of decency to the winds; such is one of the effects of war.

JOHN: 'I have often wondered what sort of fellow you are, Roger. We have both been at it on the sly. I suppose that is what makes a father and son so uncomfortable in each other's presence.'

Roger is not yet prepared to meet him half-way, but he casts a line.

ROGER: 'Do you feel the creeps when you are left alone with me?'

JOHN: 'Mortally, Roger. My first instinct is to slip away.'

ROGER: 'So is mine,' *with deep feeling*.

JOHN: 'You don't say so!' *with such surprise that the father undoubtedly goes up a step in the son's estimation.* 'I always seem to know what you are thinking, Roger.'

ROGER: 'Do you? Same here.'

JOHN: 'As a consequence it is better, it is right, it is only decent that you and I should be very chary of confidences with each other.'

ROGER: *relieved.* 'I'm dashed glad you see it in that way.'

JOHN: 'Oh, quite. And yet, Roger, if you had to answer this question on oath, "Whom do you think you are most like in this world?" I don't mean superficially, but deep down in your vitals, what would you say? Your mother, your uncle, one of your friends on the golf links?'

ROGER: 'No.'

JOHN: 'Who?'

ROGER: *Darkly,* 'You.'

JOHN: 'Just how I feel.'

There is such true sympathy in the manly avowal that Roger cannot but be brought closer to his father.

ROGER: 'It's pretty ghastly, father.'

JOHN: 'It is. I don't know which it is worse for.'

They consider each other without bitterness.

JOHN: 'You are a bit of a wag at times, Roger.'

ROGER: 'You soon shut me up.'

JOHN: 'I have heard that you sparkle more freely in my absence.'

ROGER: 'They say the same about you.'

JOHN: 'And now that you mention it, I believe it is true; and yet, isn't it a bigger satisfaction to you to catch me relishing your jokes than any other person?'

ROGER: *eyes open wide.* 'How did you know that?'

JOHN: 'Because I am so bucked if I see you relishing mine.'

ROGER: 'Are you?' *Roger's hold on the certain things in life are slipping.* 'You don't show it.'

JOHN: '*That is because of our awkward relationship.*'

ROGER: *lapses into gloom.* 'We have got to go through with it.'

His father kicks the coals.

JOHN: 'There's no way out.'

ROGER: 'No.'

JOHN: 'We have, as it were, signed a compact, Roger, never to let on that we care for each other. As gentlemen we must stick to it.'

ROGER: 'Yes. What are you getting at, father?'

JOHN: 'There is a war on, Roger.'

ROGER: 'That needn't make any difference.'

JOHN: 'Yes, it does. Roger, be ready; I hate to hit you without warning. I'm going to cast a grenade into the middle of you. It's this, I'm fond of you, my boy.'

ROGER: *squirms.* 'Father, if any one were to hear you!'

JOHN: 'They won't. The door is shut, Amy is gone to bed, and all is quiet in our street. Won't you — won't you say something civil to me in return, Roger?'

ROGER: *looks at him and away from him.* 'I sometimes — bragged about you at school.'

JOHN: *absurdly pleased.* 'Did you? What sort of things, Roger?'

ROGER: 'I — I forget.'

JOHN: 'Come on, Roger.'

ROGER: 'Is this fair, father?'

JOHN: 'No, I suppose it isn't.' *Mr. Torrance attacks the coals again.* 'You and your mother have lots of confidences, haven't you?'

ROGER: 'I tell her a good deal. Somehow—'

JOHN: 'Yes, somehow one can.' With the artfulness that comes of years, 'I'm glad you tell her everything.'

ROGER: *looks down his cigar.* 'Not everything, father. There are things — about oneself—'

JOHN: 'Aren't there, Roger!'

ROGER: 'Best not to tell her.'

JOHN: 'Yes — yes. If there are any of them you would care to tell me instead — just if you want to, mind — just if you are in a hole or anything?'

ROGER: 'No thanks,' *very stiffly.*

JOHN: 'Any little debts, for instance?'

ROGER: 'That's all right now. Mother—'

JOHN: 'She did?'

ROGER: *ready to jump at him.* 'I was willing to speak to you about them, but—'

JOHN: 'She said, "Not worth while bothering father."'

ROGER: 'How did you know?'

JOHN: 'Oh, I have met your mother before, you see. Nothing else?'

ROGER: 'No.'

JOHN: 'Haven't been an ass about a girl or anything of that sort?'

ROGER: 'Good lord, father!'

JOHN: 'I shouldn't have said it. In my young days we sometimes — It's all different

now.'

ROGER: 'I don't know, I could tell you things that would surprise you.'

JOHN: 'No! Not about yourself?'

ROGER: 'No. At least—'

JOHN: 'Just as you like, Roger.'

ROGER: 'It blew over long ago.'

JOHN: 'Then there's no need?'

ROGER: 'No — oh no. It was just — you know — the old, old story.'

He eyes his father suspiciously, but not a muscle in Mr. Torrance's countenance is out of place.

JOHN: 'I see. It hasn't — left you bitter about the sex, Roger, I hope?'

ROGER: 'Not now. She — you know what women are.'

JOHN: 'Yes, yes.'

ROGER: 'You needn't mention it to mother.'

JOHN: 'I won't.' *Mr. Torrance is elated to share a secret with Roger about which mother is not to know.* 'Think your mother and I are an aged pair, Roger?'

ROGER: 'I never — of course you are not young.'

JOHN: 'How long have you known that? I mean, it's true — but I didn't know it till quite lately.'

ROGER: 'That you're old?'

JOHN: 'Hang it, Roger, not so bad as that — elderly. This will stagger you; but I assure you that until the other day I jogged along thinking of myself as on the whole still one of the juveniles.' *He makes a wry face.* 'I crossed the bridge, Roger, without knowing it.'

ROGER: 'What made you know?'

JOHN: 'What makes us know all the new things, Roger? — the war. I'll tell you a secret. When we realised in August of 1914 that myriads of us were to be needed, my first thought wasn't that I had a son, but that I must get fit myself.'

ROGER: 'You!'

JOHN: 'Funny, isn't it?' *says Mr. Torrance quite nastily.* 'But, as I tell you, I didn't know I had ceased to be young, I went into Regent's Park and tried to run a mile.'

ROGER: 'Lummy, you might have killed yourself.'

JOHN: 'I nearly did — especially as I had put a weight on my shoulders to represent my kit. I kept at it for a week, but I knew the game was up. The discovery was pretty grim, Roger.'

ROGER: 'Don't you bother about that part of it. You are doing your share, taking care of mother and Emma.'

Mr. Torrance emits a laugh of self-contempt.

JOHN: 'I am not taking care of them. It is you who are taking care of them. My friend, you are the head of the house now.'

ROGER: 'Father!'

JOHN: 'Yes, we have come back to hard facts, and the defender of the house is the head of it.'

ROGER: 'Me? Fudge.'

JOHN: 'It's true. The thing that makes me wince most is that some of my contemporaries have managed to squeeze back: back into youth, Roger, though I guess they were a pretty tight fit in the turnstile. There is Coxon; he is in khaki now, with his hair dyed, and when he and I meet at the club we know that we belong to different generations. I'm a decent old fellow, but I don't really count any more, while Coxon, lucky dog, is being damned daily on parade.'

ROGER: 'I hate your feeling it in that way, father.'

JOHN: 'I don't say it is a palatable draught, but when the war is over we shall all shake down to the new conditions. No fear of my being sarcastic to you then, Roger. I'll have to be jolly respectful.'

ROGER: 'Shut up, father!'

JOHN: 'You've begun, you see. Don't worry, Roger. Any rawness I might feel in having missed the chance of seeing whether I was a man — like Coxon, confound him! — is swallowed up in the pride of giving the chance to you. I'm in a shiver about you, but — It's all true, Roger, what your mother said about 2nd Lieutenants. Till the other day we were so little of a military nation that most of us didn't know there were 2nd Lieutenants. And now, in thousands of homes we feel that there is nothing else. 2nd Lieutenant! It is like a new word to us — one, I daresay, of many that the war will add to our language. We have taken to it, Roger. If a son of mine were to tarnish it—'

ROGER: 'I'll try not to,' *he growls.*

JOHN: 'If you did, I should just know that there had been something wrong about me.'

ROGER: *Gruffly*, 'You're all right.'

JOHN: 'If I am, you are.' *It is a winning face that Mr. Torrance turns on his son.* 'I suppose you have been asking yourself of late, what if you were to turn out to be a funk!'

ROGER: 'Father, how did you know?'

JOHN: 'I know because you are me. Because ever since there was talk of this commission I have been thinking and thinking what were you thinking — so as to help you.'

This itself is a help. Roger's hand — but he withdraws it hurriedly.

ROGER: 'They all seem to be so frightfully brave, father,' *he says wistfully.*

JOHN: 'I expect, Roger, that the best of them had the same qualms as you before their first engagement.'

ROGER: 'I — I kind of think, father, that I won't be a funk.'

JOHN: 'I kind of think so too, Roger.' *Mr. Torrance forgets himself.* 'Mind you don't be rash, my boy; and for God's sake, keep your head down in the trenches.'

Roger has caught him out. He points a gay finger at his anxious father.

ROGER: 'You know you laughed at mother for saying that!'

JOHN: 'Did I? Roger, your mother thinks that I have an unfortunate manner with you.'

ROGER: *The magnanimous Roger says*, 'Oh, I don't know. It's just the father-and-son complication.'

JOHN: 'That is really all it is. But she thinks I should show my affection for you more openly.'

ROGER: *wiggles again. Earnestly*, 'I wouldn't do that.' Nicely, 'Of course for this once — but in a general way I wouldn't do that. We know, you and I.'

JOHN: 'As long as we know, it's no one else's affair, is it?'

ROGER: 'That's the ticket, father.'

JOHN: 'Still—' *It is to be feared that Mr. Torrance is now taking advantage of his superior slyness.* 'Still, before your mother — to please her — eh?'

ROGER: *Faltering*, 'I suppose it would.'

JOHN: 'Well, what do you say?'

ROGER: 'I know she would like it.'

JOHN: 'Of course you and I know that display of that sort is all bunkum — repellent even to our natures.'

ROGER: 'Lord, yes!'

JOHN: 'But to gratify her.'

ROGER: 'I should be so conscious.'

JOHN: *Mr. Torrance is here quite as sincere as his son.* 'So should I.'

ROGER: *considers it.* 'How far would you go?'

JOHN: 'Oh, not far. Suppose I called you "Old Rogie"? There's not much in that.'

ROGER: 'It all depends on the way one says these things.'

JOHN: 'I should be quite casual.'

ROGER: 'Hum. What would you like me to call you?'

JOHN: *Severely*, 'It isn't what would I like. But I daresay your mother would beam if you called me "dear father"'

ROGER: 'I don't think so?'

JOHN: 'You know quite well that you think so, Roger.'

ROGER: 'It's so effeminate.'

JOHN: 'Not if you say it casually.'

ROGER: *With something very like a snort asks*, 'How does one say a thing like that casually?'

JOHN: 'Well, for instance, you could whistle while you said it — or anything of that sort.'

ROGER: 'Hum. Of course you — if we were to — be like that, you wouldn't do anything.'

JOHN: 'How do you mean?'

ROGER: 'You wouldn't paw me?'

JOHN: 'Roger,' *with some natural indignation*, 'you forget yourself.' *But apparently it is for him to continue*. 'That reminds me of a story I heard the other day of a French general. He had asked for volunteers from his airmen for some specially dangerous job — and they all stepped forward. Pretty good that. Then three were chosen and got their orders and saluted, and were starting off when he stopped them. "Since when," he said, "have brave boys departing to the post of danger omitted to embrace their father?" They did it then. Good story?'

ROGER: *lowers*. 'They were French.'

JOHN: 'Yes, I said so. Don't you think it's good?'

ROGER: 'Why do you tell it to me?'

JOHN: 'Because it's a good story.'

ROGER: 'You are sure, father,' *sternly*, 'that there is no other reason?' *Mr. Torrance tries to brazen it out, but he looks guilty.* 'You know, father, that is barred.'

Just because he knows that he has been playing it low, Mr. Torrance snaps angrily,

JOHN: 'What is barred?'

ROGER: 'You know,' *says his monitor.*

Mr. Torrance shouts.

JOHN: 'I know that you are a young ass.'

ROGER: 'Really, father—'

JOHN: 'Hold your tongue.'

ROGER: *can shout also.* 'I must say, father—'

JOHN: 'Be quiet, I tell you.'

It is in the middle of this competition that the lady who dotes on them both chooses to come back, still without her spectacles.

ELLEN: 'Oh dear! And I had hoped — Oh, John!'

Mr. Torrance would like to kick himself.

JOHN: 'My fault,' he says with a groan.

ELLEN: 'But whatever is the matter?'

ROGER: 'Nothing, mater.' *The war is already making Roger quite smart.* 'Only father wouldn't do as I told him.'

Mr. Torrance cannot keep pace with his son's growth. He raps out,

JOHN: 'Why the dickens should I?'

Roger is imperturbable; this will be useful in France.

ROGER: 'You see, mater, he said I was the head of the house.'

ELLEN: 'You, Rogie!' *She goes to her husband's side.* 'What nonsense!'

ROGER: *grins.* 'Do you like my joke, father?'

The father smiles upon him and is at once uproariously happy. He digs his boy boldly in the ribs.

JOHN: 'Roger, you scoundrel!'

ELLEN: 'That's better,' *says Mrs. Torrance at a venture.*

Roger feels that things have perhaps gone far enough.

ROGER: 'I think I'll go to my room now. You will come up, mater?'

ELLEN: 'Yes, dear. I shan't be five minutes, John.'

JOHN: 'More like half an hour.'

ELLEN: *hesitates.* 'There is nothing wrong, is there? I thought I noticed a — a —'

JOHN: 'A certain liveliness, my dear. No, we were only having a good talk.'

ELLEN: 'What about, John?' *wistfully.*

ROGER: 'About the war,' *Roger breaks in hurriedly.*

JOHN: 'About tactics and strategy, wasn't it, Roger?'

ROGER: 'Yes.'

JOHN: 'The fact is, Ellen, I have been helping Roger to take his first trench.' *With a big breath,* 'And we took it too, together, didn't we, Roger?'

ROGER: 'You bet,' *says Roger valiantly.*

JOHN: 'Though I suppose,' *sighing,* 'it is one of those trenches that the enemy retake during the night.'

ROGER: 'Oh, I — I don't know, father.'

ELLEN: 'Whatever are you two talking about?'

JOHN: 'Aha,' *in high feather, patting her, but unable to resist a slight boast,* 'it is

very private. We don't tell you everything, you know, Ellen.'

She beams, though she does not understand.

ROGER: 'Come on, mater, it's only his beastly sarcasm again. 'Night, father; I won't see you in the morning.'

JOHN: 'Night,'

But Roger has not gone yet. He seems to be looking for something — a book, perhaps. Then he begins to whistle — casually.

ROGER: 'Good-night, dear father.'

Mr. John Torrance is left alone, rubbing his hands.

THE OLD LADY SHOWS HER MEDALS

COMMENTARY

The Old Lady Shows Her Medals premiered on 7 April 1917 at the New Theatre in London in a triple bill that included another Barrie play, *Seven Women*, and *Wurzel-Flummery*, by A. A. Milne. Originally written to be staged by amateur groups hoping to raise money for the war relief effort to support casualties of the war and their families, *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals* went on to be one of Barrie's most often performed and revived works and ran for sixty eight performances. The critic Walbrook describes it as 'another of the author's touching plays of the great war, and the acting in it of Miss Jean Cadell as the charwoman who "adopts" a private of the Black Watch and treats him as her son, was on a very high level of histrionic art.'

Of all Barrie's war plays it is the one that most explicitly deals with patriotism. It also, quite unusually for the time, features the working classes; so that one wonders what Barrie's middle class audiences might have made of it. We might expect them to look down on the characters, and the premise of the play is certainly based on a lie, giving the audience the moral high ground. Mrs Dowey (a charwoman) feels socially disadvantaged because she doesn't have a son, so she 'adopts' one – but her imagination turns to awkward reality when he then turns up on her doorstep. It seems that the play will be about catching her out in her lie.

Barrie pokes fun at her in the opening stage directions. He is fully aware of the picture he is portraying. His goal is to challenge expectations of the audience and of class in general. The setting is significant - looking down into the basement room from the street equates to looking down in social class.

The opportunity to look into the private lives of their 'servants' would doubtless be intriguing to his contemporary audience. Barrie was well known already for writing plays about social class and manners. (*The Admirable Crichton*, *Quality Street* and *What Every Woman Knows* were successes in the previous decade) and Barrie certainly walks a careful tightrope here, lampooning both the women and indeed the Scots in a way that might be considered rude if it didn't work so well.

You need to understand Barrie's famous quote from *What Every Woman Knows* (1908) 'There are few more impressive sights in the world than a Scotsman on the make' to fully comprehend his satirical, edgy, sense of humour. That Barrie himself was such a Scotsman simply shows that he was fully aware of his own part in the play. Failing to understand this element leaves the reader/audience in the position of Mrs Torrance in *The New Word*. There's a fine line between sarcasm and wit. Barrie knows it and walks the tightrope with ease.

In *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals* we are quickly drawn to a kind of sympathy, if not empathy with the characters. Their overarching desire is the need for personal involvement. The war brought out a sense that 'we're all in it together'

which in some way united the disparate classes. The understanding that this was 'everybody's war' is reflected in the opening exchange between the four women who have gathered for tea in the basement flat of Mrs. Dowey. [Our heroine!]

Barrie deftly manages to combine the universality of the idea that one's true family is a family of choice rather than birth, exposing a view of mother-son relationships that extends beyond giving birth, with the specifics of a domestic play which only makes 'sense' at this particular time and in this particular place. We should remember that this play was written and performed after the Somme campaign, and in that respect everything about it is different from the spirit and understanding of the earlier *The New Word*.

The importance of social standing even within the lower ranks (charwoman or charwoman 'and' being a significant distinction) is obvious. We are reminded that this war *was* everybody's war. Even charwomen sacrificed their sons. But Mrs Dowey, the 'old lady' has a dark secret. She has no son, and it is fearing the lack of status or as we might say today 'investment' that causes her to invent one. The other women appear less interested in the enemy and more in sustaining their own patriotic position – for example being recipients of letters from the front is a status symbol without parallel. Something to boast about. In this context we can perhaps excuse Mrs Dowey her ridiculous (and fraudulent) activity. We find ourselves feeling sorry for her even as we know we should not condone her behaviour.

Barrie portrays the women with sympathetic humour and transmutes fiction into fact when the 'real' Kenneth Dowey arrives, thanks to the actions of a well meaning clergyman. The developing relationship between this created mother and son serves to show us that 'family' has a broad meaning. And fiction continues to be transmuted into fact as the play progresses. From a position of almost cruelty, certainly through an introduction based on mockery, a love bond develops between Kenneth and his 'mother.'

There is consequently a poignancy rather than absurdity when Mrs Dowey explains to Kenneth:

'It was everybody's war, mister, except mine. I wanted it to be my war too. [...] It didn't affect me. It affected everybody but me. The neighbours looked down on me. Even the posters, on the walls, of the woman saying, "Go, my boy," leered at me. I sometimes cried by myself in the dark.'

Academic Mary Eileen Rush wrote in the 1920s: *'In this play we have unfolded to us the mind of many during the war who wanted to own someone fighting 'over there.'*

Barrie sets up the play's conceit, perhaps more accurately its 'deceit', so that it is more plausible than fanciful; in the process making us consider the war and its impact in some quite unusual ways. Kenneth, originally sceptical, warms to Mrs Dowey and the two make the most of his furlough time. Which of course presents the inevitable pathos of the parting. Now she has an 'investment' in the war, Mrs

Dowey is going to suffer the fate of so many mothers. But she is willing to make the sacrifice.

The central part of the play is the relationship between ‘mother’ and ‘son’ but the role of the other women should not be underestimated. They help to contextualise the social situation. In their consideration of what life will be like after the war, they are most concerned about how their status will be affected. It appears they are less concerned with the outcome of ‘victory’ over the Germans and more about how their own domestic standing will change.

They ponder on what the future holds:

“Sitting here by the fire, you and me, as one to another,” Mrs. Twymley asks,

“What do you think will happen after the war? Are we to go back to being as we were?”

Mrs. Mickleham replies in the negative; “The war has wakened me up to a [sic] understanding of my own importance that is really astonishing.”

Mrs. Twymley agrees, adding, “Instead of being the poor worms the like of you and me thought we was, we turns out to be visible departments of a great and haughty empire.”

They end on the rather dismal thought that “it is a terrible war,” (reiterating what Mrs. Dowey observed at the beginning of the play) and that they do not know what will happen when it ends. When written and performed in 1917 the war seemed far from over and it is impossible to predict what will happen. People are just living, day by day. From the *new world* they had achieved a new normality. And it was bleak.

The play gives us much to consider, and the epilogue in which a piper plays ‘The Flowers of the Forest’ (the song of the Black Watch) suggests to us that Kenneth has died. Mrs Dowey is no longer a fraud, placed in the honest position of grieving for a lost loved one. She has a medal and memories. There is an open-endedness to it, but also a sense of inevitability.

The realistic portrayal of the play was considered by a reviewer for *The Times* to be: ‘*despite its flaws and quaintness—ultimately, “fundamentally true”*’ and the character of Mrs. Dowey is described as: ‘*so beautiful, so truly comic and so truly pathetic.*’

There was some contemporary criticism of the dialogue, (for being common) which suggests some critics (and audiences?) found the play uncomfortable. Certainly it differed from the escapist, propagandist theatre prevalent at the time. It was too close to the bone for some. But generally the public liked it. Ultimately even a critical reviewer had to accept that Barrie:

“achieves the pathetic without slipping over into the mawkish [...] the piece is pure gold, perfectly wrought.”

The play was also performed successfully in America in 1917 and given revivals after the war, though many considered it a piece ‘of its time.’ It was also made into a movie in the 1930s and revived on television both in the 50s and 60s.

We might see it as a primitive precursor of kitchen sink drama.

In 1920 Phelps writes: *'across every title-page of Barrie's books might be written, "Human nature is always and everywhere the same." Mrs. Dowey's conquest of her hypothetical son cannot possibly be described; only Barrie, with his insight born of divine sympathy, could have imagined it.'*

He continues: *'It is, like all Barrie's plays, like the story of everyman life, a tragi-comedy. The early scenes arouse inextinguishable laughter; in the last act, the ordinary relation of audience to stage is reversed. Instead of noise on the stage and silence in the auditorium, the solitary woman moved about in absolute stillness while unrestrained sobbing is heard all over the house. The heroine is a charwoman, elevated to a vertiginous height by solemn pride.'*

The Old Lady Shows Her Medals is a play well suited to amateur performance -and one well worth revisiting a century on from its first performance. It draws us into a reality and a past and forces us to consider the human condition at the same time. Humour and pathos were never so well drawn.

THE OLD LADY SHOWS HER MEDALS

Cast:

Mrs Haggerty (The Haggerty woman) 50s/60s

Mrs Dowey (the criminal) 50s/60s

Mrs Twymley 50s/60s

Mrs Mickleham 50s/60s

Mr Willings (clergyman) middle aged

Kenneth (the soldier) 20s/30s

Three nice old ladies and a criminal, who is even nicer, are discussing the war over a cup of tea. The criminal, who is the hostess, calls it a dish of tea, which shows that she comes from Caledonia; but that is not her crime.

They are all London charwomen, but three of them, including the hostess, are what are called professionally ‘charwomen and’ or simply ‘ands.’ An ‘and’ is also a caretaker when required; her name is entered as such in ink in a registry book, financial transactions take place across a counter between her and the registrar, and altogether she is of a very different social status from one who, like Mrs. Haggerty, is a charwoman but nothing else. Mrs. Haggerty, though present, is not at the party by invitation; having seen Mrs. Dowey buying the winkles, she followed her downstairs, so has shuffled into the play and sat down in it against our wish. We would remove her by force, or at least print her name in small letters, were it not that she takes offence very readily and says that nobody respects her. So, as you have slipped in, you sit there, Mrs. Haggerty; but keep quiet.

There is nothing doing at present in the caretaking way for Mrs. Dowey, our hostess; but this does not damp her, caretaking being only to such as she an extra financially and a halo socially. If she had the honour of being served with an income-tax paper she would probably fill in one of the nasty little compartments with the words, ‘Trade — charring; Profession (if any) — caretaking.’ This home of hers (from which, to look after your house, she makes occasionally temporary departures in great style, escorting a barrow) is in one of those what-care-I streets that you discover only when you have lost your way; on discovering them, your duty is to report them to the authorities, who immediately add them to the map of London. That is why we are now reporting Friday Street. We shall call it, in the rough sketch drawn for tomorrow’s press, ‘Street in which the criminal resided’; and you will find Mrs. Dowey’s home therein marked with a X.

Her abode really consists of one room, but she maintains that there are two; so,

rather than argue, let us say that there are two. The other one has no window, and she could not swish her old skirts in it without knocking something over; its grandest display is of tin pans and crockery on top of a dresser which has a lid to it; you have but to whip off the utensils and raise the lid, and, behold, a bath with hot and cold. Mrs. Dowey is very proud of this possession, and when she shows it off, as she does perhaps too frequently, she first signs to you with closed fist (funny old thing that she is) to approach softly. She then tiptoes to the dresser and pops off the lid, as if to take the bath unawares. Then she sucks her lips, and is modest if you have the grace to do the exclamations.

In the real room is a bed, though that is putting the matter too briefly. The fair way to begin, if you love Mrs. Dowey, is to say to her that it is a pity she has no bed. If she is in her best form she will chuckle, and agree that the want of a bed tries her sore; she will keep you on the hooks, so to speak, as long as she can; and then, with that mouse-like movement again, she will suddenly spring the bed on you. You thought it was a wardrobe, but she brings it down from the wall; and lo, a bed. There is nothing else in her abode (which we now see to contain four rooms — kitchen, pantry, bedroom, and bathroom) that is absolutely a surprise; but it is full of 'bits,' every one of which has been paid ready money for, and gloated over and tended until it has become part of its owner. Genuine Doweys, the dealers might call them, though there is probably nothing in the place except the bed that would fetch half-a-crown.

Her home is in the basement, so that the view is restricted to the lower half of persons passing overhead beyond the area stairs. Here at the window Mrs. Dowey sometimes sits of a summer evening gazing, not sentimentally at a flower-pot which contains one poor bulb, nor yearningly at some tiny speck of sky, but with unholy relish at holes in stockings, and the like, which are revealed to her from her point of vantage. You, gentle reader, may flaunt by, thinking that your finery awes the street, but Mrs. Dowey can tell (and does) that your soles are in need of neat repair.

Also, lower parts being as expressive as the face to those whose view is thus limited, she could swear to scores of the passers-by in a court of law.

These four lively old codgers are having a good time at the tea-table, and wit is flowing free. As you can see by their everyday garments, and by their pails and mops (which are having a little tea-party by themselves in the corner), it is not a gathering by invitations stretching away into yesterday, it is a purely informal affair; so much more attractive, don't you think? than banquets elaborately prearranged. You know how they come about, especially in war-time. Very likely Mrs. Dowey met Mrs. Twymley and Mrs. Mickleham quite casually in the street, and meant to do no more than the time of day; then, naturally enough, the word camouflage was mentioned, and they got heated, but in the end Mrs. Twymley

apologised; then, in the odd way in which one thing leads to another, the wrinkle man appeared, and Mrs. Dowey remembered that she had that pot of jam and that Mrs. Mickleham had stood treat last time; and soon they were all three descending the area stairs, followed cringingly by the Haggerty Woman.

They have been extremely merry, and never were four hard-worked old ladies who deserved it better. All a woman can do in war-time they do daily and cheerfully. Just as their men-folk are doing it at the Front; and now, with the mops and pails laid aside, they sprawl gracefully at ease. There is no intention on their part to consider peace terms until a decisive victory has been gained in the field (Sarah Ann Dowey), until the Kaiser is put to the right-about (Emma Mickleham), and singing very small (Amelia Twymley).

At this tea-party the lady who is to play the part of Mrs. Dowey is sure to want to suggest that our heroine has a secret sorrow, namely, the crime; but you should see us knocking that idea out of her head! Mrs. Dowey knows she is a criminal, but, unlike the actress, she does not know that she is about to be found out; and she is, to put it bluntly in her own Scotch way, the merriest of the whole clanjamfry. She presses more tea on her guests, but they wave her away from them in the pretty manner of ladies who know that they have already had more than enough.

MRS. DOWEY: 'Just one more wrinkle, Mrs. Mickleham?' Indeed there is only one more.

But Mrs. Mickleham indicates politely that if she took this one it would have to swim for it. (The Haggerty Woman takes it long afterwards when she thinks, erroneously, that no one is looking.)

Mrs. Twymley is sulking. Evidently someone has contradicted her. Probably the Haggerty Woman.

MRS. TWYMLEY: 'I say it is so.'

THE HAGGERTY WOMAN: 'I say it may be so.'

MRS. TWYMLEY: 'I suppose I ought to know: me that has a son a prisoner in Germany.' *She has so obviously scored that all good feeling seems to call upon her to end here. But she continues rather shabbily, 'Being the only lady present that has that proud misfortune.'*

The others are stung.

MRS. DOWEY: 'My son is fighting in France.'

MRS. MICKLEHAM: 'Mine is wounded in two places.'

THE HAGGERTY WOMAN: 'Mine is at Salonaiky.'

The absurd pronunciation of this uneducated person moves the others to mirth.

MRS. DOWEY: 'You'll excuse us, Mrs. Haggerty, but the correct pronunciation is Salonikky.'

THE HAGGERTY WOMAN: *to cover her confusion.* 'I don't think.' *She feels that even this does not prove her case.* 'And I speak as one that has War Savings Certificates.'

MRS. TWYMLEY: 'We all have them.'

The Haggerty Woman whimpers, and the other guests regard her with unfeeling disdain.

MRS. DOWEY: *to restore cheerfulness,* 'Oh, it's a terrible war.'

ALL: *brightening,* 'It is. You may say so.'

MRS. DOWEY: *encouraged,* 'What I say is, the men is splendid, but I'm none so easy about the staff. That's your weak point, Mrs. Mickleham.'

MRS. MICKLEHAM: *on the defence, but determined to reveal nothing that might be of use to the enemy,* 'You may take it from me, the staff's all right.'

MRS. DOWEY: 'And very relieved I am to hear you say it.'

It is here that the Haggerty Woman has the remaining winkle.

MRS. MICKLEHAM: 'You don't understand properly about trench warfare. If I had a map — —'

MRS. DOWEY: *wetting her finger to draw lines on the table.* 'That's the river Sommy. Now, if we had barrages here — —'

MRS. TWYMLEY: 'Very soon you would be enfiladed. Where's your supports, my lady?' *Mrs. Dowey is damped.*

MRS. MICKLEHAM: 'What none of you grasps is that this is an artillery war — —'

THE HAGGERTY WOMAN: *strengthened by the winkle*, ‘I say that the word is Salonaiky.’

The others purse their lips.

MRS. TWYMLEY: *with terrible meaning*, ‘We’ll change the subject. Have you seen this week’s Fashion Chat?’ *She has evidently seen and devoured it herself, and even licked up the crumbs.* ‘The gabardine with accordion pleats has quite gone out.’

MRS. DOWEY: *her old face sparkling*. ‘My sakes! You tell me?’

MRS. TWYMLEY: *with the touch of haughtiness that comes of great topics*, ‘The plain smock has come in again, with silk lacing, giving that charming chic effect.’

MRS. DOWEY: ‘Oho!’

MRS. MICKLEHAM. ‘I must say I was always partial to the straight line’ — *thoughtfully regarding the want of line in Mrs. Twymley’s person*— ‘though trying to them as is of too friendly a figure.’

It is here that the Haggerty Woman’s fingers close unostentatiously upon a piece of sugar.

MRS. TWYMLEY, *sailing into the Empyrean*, ‘Lady Dolly Kanister was seen conversing across the railings in a dainty de jou.’

MRS. DOWEY. ‘Fine would I have liked to see her.’

MRS. TWYMLEY. ‘She is equally popular as maid, wife, and munition-worker. Her two children is inset. Lady Pops Babington was married in a tight tulle.’

MRS. MICKLEHAM. ‘What was her going-away dress?’

MRS. TWYMLEY. ‘A champagne cream velvet with dreamy corsage. She’s married to Colonel the Hon. Chingford—”Snubs,” they called him at Eton.’

THE HAGGERTY WOMAN, *having disposed of the sugar*, ‘Very likely he’ll be sent to Salonaiky.’

MRS. MICKLEHAM. ‘Wherever he is sent, she’ll have the same tremors as the rest of us. She’ll be as keen to get the letters wrote with pencils as you or me.’

MRS. TWYMLEY. ‘Them pencil letters!’

MRS. DOWEY, *in her sweet Scotch voice, timidly, afraid she may be going too far*, 'And women in enemy lands gets those pencil letters and then stop getting them, the same as ourselves. Let's occasionally think of that.'

She has gone too far. Chairs are pushed back.

THE HAGGERTY WOMAN. 'I ask you!'

MRS. MICKLEHAM. 'That's hardly language, Mrs. Dowey.'

MRS. DOWEY, *scared*, 'Kindly excuse. I swear to death I'm none of your pacifists.'

MRS. MICKLEHAM. 'Freely granted.'

MRS. TWYMLEY. 'I've heard of females that have no male relations, and so they have no man-party at the wars. I've heard of them, but I don't mix with them.'

MRS. MICKLEHAM. 'What can the likes of us have to say to them? It's not their war.'

MRS. DOWEY, *wistfully*, 'They are to be pitied.'

MRS. MICKLEHAM. 'But the place for them, Mrs. Dowey, is within doors with the blinds down.'

MRS. DOWEY, *hurriedly*, 'That's the place for them.'

MRS. MICKLEHAM. 'I saw one of them today buying a flag. I thought it was very impudent of her.'

MRS. DOWEY, *meekly*, 'So it was.'

MRS. MICKLEHAM, *trying to look modest with indifferent success*, 'I had a letter from my son, Percy, yesterday.'

MRS. TWYMLEY. 'Alfred sent me his photo.'

THE HAGGERTY WOMAN. 'Letters from Salonaiky is less common.'

Three bosoms heave, but not, alas, Mrs. Dowey's. Nevertheless she doggedly knits her lips.

MRS. DOWEY, *the criminal*, 'Kenneth writes to me every week.' *There are*

exclamations. The dauntless old thing holds aloft a packet of letters. 'Look at this. All his.'

The Haggerty Woman whimpers.

MRS. TWYMLEY. 'Alfred has little time for writing, being a bombardier.'

MRS. DOWEY, relentlessly, 'Do your letters begin "Dear mother"?'

MRS. TWYMLEY. 'Generally.'

MRS. MICKLEHAM. 'Invariable.'

THE HAGGERTY WOMAN. 'Every time.'

MRS. DOWEY, *delivering the knock-out blow*, 'Kenneth's begin "Dearest mother."'

No one can think of the right reply.

MRS. TWYMLEY, *doing her best*, 'A short man, I should say, judging by yourself.'

She ought to have left it alone.

MRS. DOWEY. 'Six feet two-and a half.'

The gloom deepens.

MRS. MICKLEHAM, *against her better judgment*, 'A kilty, did you tell me?'

MRS. DOWEY. 'Most certainly. He's in the famous Black Watch.'

THE HAGGERTY WOMAN, *producing her handkerchief*, 'The Surrey Rifles is the famousest.'

MRS. MICKLEHAM. 'There you and the King disagrees, Mrs. Haggerty. His choice is the Buffs, same as my Percy's.'

MRS. TWYMLEY, *magnanimously*, 'Give me the R.H.A. and you can keep all the rest.'

MRS. DOWEY. 'I'm sure I have nothing to say against the Surreys and the R.H.A. and the Buffs; but they are just breeches regiments, I understand.'

THE HAGGERTY WOMAN. 'We can't all be kilties.'

MRS. DOWEY, *crushingly*, 'That's very true.'

MRS. TWYMLEY. *It is foolish of her, but she can't help saying it.* 'Has your Kenneth great hairy legs?'

MRS. DOWEY. 'Tremendous.'

The wicked woman: but let us also say 'Poor Sarah Ann Dowey.' For at this moment, enter Nemesis. In other words, the less important part of a clergyman appears upon the stair.

MRS. MICKLEHAM. 'It's the reverent gent!'

MRS. DOWEY, *little knowing what he is bringing her*, 'I see he has had his boots heeled.'

It may be said of Mr. Willings that his happy smile always walks in front of him. This smile makes music of his life, it means that once again he has been chosen, in his opinion, as the central figure in romance. No one can well have led a more drab existence, but he will never know it; he will always think of himself, humbly though elatedly, as the chosen of the gods. Of him must it have been originally written that adventures are for the adventurous. He meets them at every street corner. For instance, he assists an old lady off a bus, and asks her if he can be of any further help. She tells him that she wants to know the way to Maddox the butcher's. Then comes the kind, triumphant smile; it always comes first, followed by its explanation, 'I was there yesterday!' This is the merest sample of the adventures that keep Mr. Willings up to the mark.

Since the war broke out, his zest for life has become almost terrible. He can scarcely lift a newspaper and read of a hero without remembering that he knows some one of the name. The Soldiers' Rest he is connected with was once a china emporium, and (mark my words), he had bought his tea service at it. Such is life when you are in the thick of it. Sometimes he feels that he is part of a gigantic spy drama. In the course of his extraordinary comings and goings he meets with Great Personages, of course, and is the confidential recipient of secret news. Before imparting the news he does not, as you might expect, first smile expansively; on the contrary, there comes over his face an awful solemnity, which, however, means the same thing. When divulging the names of the personages, he first looks around to make sure that no suspicious character is about, and then, lowering his voice, tells you, 'I had that from Mr. Farthing himself — he is the secretary of the Bethnal Green Branch, — h'sh!'

There is a commotion about finding a worthy chair for the reverent, and there is also some furtive pulling down of sleeves, but he stands surveying the ladies through his triumphant smile. This amazing man knows that he is about to score again.

MR. WILLINGS, *waving aside the chairs*, ‘I thank you. But not at all. Friends, I have news.’

MRS. MICKLEHAM. ‘News?’

THE HAGGERTY WOMAN. ‘From the Front?’

MRS. TWYMLEY. ‘My Alfred, sir?’

They are all grown suddenly anxious — all except the hostess, who knows that there can never be any news from the Front for her.

MR. WILLINGS. ‘I tell you at once that all is well. The news is for Mrs. Dowey.’

She stares.

MRS. DOWEY. ‘News for me?’

MR. WILLINGS. ‘Your son, Mrs. Dowey — he has got five days’ leave.’ *She shakes her head slightly, or perhaps it only trembles a little on its stem.* ‘Now, now, good news doesn’t kill.’

MRS. TWYMLEY. ‘We’re glad, Mrs. Dowey.’

MRS. DOWEY. ‘You’re sure?’

MR. WILLINGS. ‘Quite sure. He has arrived.’

MRS. DOWEY. ‘He is in London?’

MR. WILLINGS. ‘He is. I have spoken to him.’

MRS. MICKLEHAM. ‘You lucky woman.’

They might see that she is not looking lucky, but experience has told them how differently these things take people.

MR. WILLINGS, *marvelling more and more as he unfolds his tale*, ‘Ladies, it is quite a romance, I was in the — —’ *he looks around cautiously, but he knows that*

they are all to be trusted— ‘in the Church Army quarters in Central Street, trying to get on the track of one or two of our missing men. Suddenly my eyes — I can’t account for it — but suddenly my eyes alighted on a Highlander seated rather drearily on a bench, with his kit at his feet.’

THE HAGGERTY WOMAN. ‘A big man?’

MR. WILLINGS. ‘A great brawny fellow.’ *The Haggerty Woman groans.* “My friend,” I said at once, “welcome back to Blighty.” I make a point of calling it Blighty. “I wonder,” I said, “if there is anything I can do for you?” He shook his head. “What regiment?” I asked.’ Here Mr. Willings very properly lowers his voice to a whisper. “Black Watch, 5th Battalion,” he said. “Name?” I asked. “Dowey,” he said.’

MRS. MICKLEHAM. ‘I declare. I do declare.’

MR. WILLINGS, *showing how the thing was done, with the help of a chair,* ‘I put my hand on his shoulder as it might be thus. “Kenneth Dowey,” I said, “I know your mother.”’

MRS. DOWEY, *wetting her lips,* ‘What did he say to that?’

MR. WILLINGS. ‘He was incredulous. Indeed, he seemed to think I was balmy. But I offered to bring him straight to you. I told him how much you had talked to me about him.’

MRS. DOWEY. ‘Bring him here!’

MRS. MICKLEHAM. ‘I wonder he needed to be brought.’

MR. WILLINGS. ‘He had just arrived, and was bewildered by the great city. He listened to me in the taciturn Scotch way, and then he gave a curious laugh.’

MRS. TWYMLEY. ‘Laugh?’

MR. WILLINGS, *whose wild life has brought him into contact with the strangest people,* ‘The Scotch, Mrs. Twymley, express their emotions differently from us. With them tears signify a rollicking mood, while merriment denotes that they are plunged in gloom. When I had finished he said at once, “Let us go and see the old lady.”’

MRS. DOWEY, *backing, which is the first movement she has made since he began his tale,* ‘Is he — coming?’

MR. WILLINGS, *gloriously*, 'He has come. He is up there. I told him I thought I had better break the joyful news to you.'

Three women rush to the window. Mrs. Dowey looks at her pantry door, but perhaps she remembers that it does not lock on the inside. She stands rigid, though her face has gone very grey.

MRS. DOWEY. 'Kindly get them to go away.'

MR. WILLINGS. 'Ladies, I think this happy occasion scarcely requires you.' He is not the man to ask of woman a sacrifice that he is not prepared to make himself. 'I also am going instantly.'

They all survey Mrs. Dowey, and understand — or think they understand.

MRS. TWYMLEY, *pail and mop in hand*, 'I would thank none for their company if my Alfred was at the door.'

MRS. MICKLEHAM, *similarly burdened*, 'The same from me. Shall I send him down, Mrs. Dowey?' The old lady does not hear her. She is listening, terrified, for a step on the stairs. 'Look at the poor, joyous thing, sir. She has his letters in her hand.'

The three women go. Mr. Willings puts a kind hand on Mrs. Dowey's shoulder. He thinks he so thoroughly understands the situation.

MR. WILLINGS. 'A good son, Mrs. Dowey, to have written to you so often.' *Our old criminal quakes, but she grips the letters more tightly. Private Dowey descends.* 'Dowey, my friend, there she is, waiting for you, with your letters in her hand.'

DOWEY(KENNETH): *grimly*, 'That's great.'

Mr. Willings ascends the stair without one backward glance, like the good gentleman he is; and the Doweys are left together, with nearly the whole room between them. He is a great rough chunk of Scotland, howked out of her not so much neatly as liberally; and in his Black Watch uniform, all caked with mud, his kit and nearly all his worldly possessions on his back, he is an apparition scarcely less fearsome (but so much less ragged) than those ancestors of his who trotted with Prince Charlie to Derby. He stands silent, scowling at the old lady, daring her to raise her head; and she would like very much to do it, for she longs to have a first glimpse of her son. When he does

Speak, it is to jeer at her.

KENNETH: 'Do you recognise your loving son, missis?' (*Oh, the fine Scotch tang of him, she thinks.*) 'I'm pleased I wrote so often.' (*Oh, but he's raised, she thinks.*) *He strides towards her, and seizes the letters roughly, 'Let's see them.'*

There is a string round the package, and he unties it, and examines the letters at his leisure with much curiosity. The envelopes are in order, all addressed in pencil to Mrs. Dowey, with the proud words 'Opened by Censor' on them. But the letter paper inside contains not a word of writing.

KENNETH: 'Nothing but blank paper! Is this your writing in pencil on the envelope?'

She nods, and he gives the matter further consideration.

KENNETH: 'The covey told me you were a charwoman; so I suppose you picked the envelopes out of waste-paper baskets, or such like, and then changed the addresses?'

She nods again; still she dare not look up, but she is admiring his legs. When, however, he would cast the letters into the fire, she flames up with sudden spirit. She clutches them.

MRS DOWEY: 'Don't you burn them letters, mister.'

KENNETH: 'They're not real letters.'

MRS DOWEY: 'They're all I have.'

KENNETH: *returns to irony.* 'I thought you had a son?'

MRS DOWEY: 'I never had a man nor a son nor anything. I just call myself Missis to give me a standing.'

KENNETH: 'Well, it's past my seeing through.'

He turns to look for some explanation from the walls. She gets a peep at him at last. Oh, what a grandly set-up man! Oh, the stride of him. Oh, the noble rage of him. Oh, Samson had been like this before that woman took him in hand.

KENNETH: whirls round on her. 'What made you do it?'

MRS DOWEY: 'It was everybody's war, mister, except mine.' *She beats her arms.* 'I wanted it to be my war too.'

KENNETH: 'You'll need to be plainer. And yet I'm d — d if I care to hear you, you lying old trickster.'

The words are merely what were to be expected, and so are endurable; but he has moved towards the door.

MRS DOWEY: 'You're not going already, mister?'

KENNETH: 'Yes, I just came to give you an ugly piece of my mind.'

MRS DOWEY: *holds out her arms longingly.* 'You haven't gave it to me yet.'

KENNETH: 'You have a cheek!'

MRS DOWEY: *gives further proof of it.* 'You wouldn't drink some tea?'

KENNETH: 'Me! I tell you I came here for the one purpose of blazing away at you.'

It is such a roaring negative that it blows her into a chair. But she is up again in a moment, is this spirited old lady. You could drink the tea while you was blazing away.

MRS DOWEY: 'There's winkles.'

KENNETH: 'Is there?' *He turns interestedly towards the table, but his proud Scots character checks him, which is just as well, for what she should have said was that there had been winkles.* 'Not me. You're just a common rogue.' *He seats himself far from the table.* 'Now, then, out with it. Sit down!' *She sits meekly; there is nothing she would not do for him.* 'As you char, I suppose you are on your feet all day.'

MRS DOWEY: 'I'm more on my knees.'

KENNETH: 'That's where you should be to me.'

MRS DOWEY: 'Oh, mister, I'm willing.'

KENNETH: 'Stop it. Go on, you accomplished liar.'

MRS DOWEY: 'It's true that my name is Dowey.'

KENNETH: 'It's enough to make me change mine.'

MRS DOWEY: 'I've been charring and charring and charring as far back as I mind. I've been in London this twenty years.'

KENNETH: 'We'll skip your early days. I have an appointment.'

MRS DOWEY: 'And then when I was old the war broke out.'

KENNETH: 'How could it affect you?'

MRS DOWEY: 'Oh, mister, that's the thing. It didn't affect me. It affected everybody but me. The neighbours looked down on me. Even the posters, on the walls, of the woman saying, "Go, my boy," leered at me. I sometimes cried by myself in the dark. You won't have a cup of tea?'

KENNETH: 'No.'

MRS DOWEY: 'Sudden like the idea came to me to pretend I had a son.'

KENNETH: 'You depraved old limmer! But what in the name of Old Nick made you choose me out of the whole British Army?'

Mrs. Dowey giggles. There is little doubt that in her youth she was an accomplished flirt.

MRS DOWEY: 'Maybe, mister, it was because I liked you best.'

KENNETH: 'Now, now, woman.'

MRS DOWEY: 'I read one day in the papers, "In which, he was assisted by Private K. Dowey, 5th Battalion, Black Watch."'

KENNETH: *Private K. Dowey is flattered*, 'Did you, now! Well, I expect that's the only time I was ever in the papers.'

MRS DOWEY: *tries it on again*, 'I didn't choose you for that alone. I read a history of the Black Watch first, to make sure it was the best regiment in the world.'

KENNETH: 'Anybody could have told you that.' *He is moving about now in better humour, and, meeting the loaf in his stride, he cuts a slice from it. He is hardly aware of this, but Mrs. Dowey knows.* 'I like the Scotch voice of you, woman. It

drummles on like a hill burn.'

MRS DOWEY: 'Prosen Water runs by where I was born.' Flirting again, 'May be it teached me to speak, mister.'

KENNETH: 'Canny, woman, canny.'

MRS DOWEY: 'I read about the Black Watch's ghostly piper that plays proudly when the men of the Black Watch do well, and prouder when they fall.'

KENNETH: 'There's some foolish story of that kind.' *He has another careless slice off the loaf.* 'But you couldn't have been living here at that time or they would have guessed. I suppose you flitted?'

MRS DOWEY: 'Yes, it cost me eleven and sixpence.'

KENNETH: 'How did you guess the K in my name stood for Kenneth?'

MRS DOWEY: 'Does it?'

KENNETH: 'Umpha.'

MRS DOWEY: 'An angel whispered it to me in my sleep.'

KENNETH: 'Well, that's the only angel in the whole black business.' *He chuckles.* 'You little thought I would turn up!' *Wheeling suddenly on her.* 'Or did you?'

MRS DOWEY: 'I was beginning to weary for a sight of you, Kenneth.'

KENNETH: 'What word was that?'

MRS DOWEY: 'Mister.'

He helps himself to butter, and she holds out the jam pot to him, but he haughtily rejects it. Do you think she gives in now? Not a bit of it.

KENNETH: *returns to sarcasm,* 'I hope you're pleased with me now you see me.'

MRS DOWEY: 'I'm very pleased. Does your folk live in Scotland?'

KENNETH: 'Glasgow.'

MRS DOWEY: 'Both living?'

KENNETH: 'Ay.'

MRS DOWEY: 'Is your mother terrible proud of you?'

KENNETH: 'Naturally.'

MRS DOWEY: 'You'll be going to them?'

KENNETH: 'After I've had a skite in London first.'

MRS DOWEY: *sniffs*, 'So she is in London!'

KENNETH: 'Who?'

MRS DOWEY: 'Your young lady.'

KENNETH: 'Are you jealyous?'

MRS DOWEY: 'Not me.'

KENNETH: 'You needna be. She's a young thing.'

MRS DOWEY: 'You surprises me. A beauty, no doubt?'

KENNETH: 'You may be sure.' *He tries the jam.* 'She's a titled person. She is equally popular as maid, wife and munition-worker.'

Mrs. DoweY remembers Lady Dolly Kanister, so familiar to readers of fashionable gossip, and a very leery expression indeed comes into her face.

MRS DOWEY: 'Tell me more about her, man.'

KENNETH: 'She has sent me a lot of things, especially cakes, and a worsted waistcoat, with a loving message on the enclosed card.'

The old lady is now in a quiver of excitement. She loses control of her arms, which jump excitedly this way and that.

MRS DOWEY: 'You'll try one of my cakes, mister?'

KENNETH: 'Not me.'

MRS DOWEY: 'They're of my own making.'

KENNETH: 'No, I thank you.'

But with a funny little run she is in the pantry and back again. She planks down a cake before him, at sight of which he gapes.

MRS DOWEY: 'What's the matter? Tell me, oh, tell me, mister.'

KENNETH: 'That's exactly the kind of cake that her ladyship sends me.'

Mrs. Dowey is now a very glorious old character indeed.

MRS DOWEY: 'Is the waistcoat right, mister? I hope the Black Watch colours pleased you.'

KENNETH: 'Wha — t! Was it you?'

MRS DOWEY: 'I daredna give my own name, you see, and I was always reading hers in the papers.'

The badgered man looms over her, terrible for the last time.

KENNETH: 'Woman, is there no getting rid of you!'

MRS DOWEY: 'Are you angry?'

He sits down with a groan.

KENNETH 'Oh, hell! Give me some tea.'

She rushes about preparing a meal for him, every bit of her wanting to cry out to every other bit, 'Oh, glory, glory, glory!' For a moment she hovers behind his chair.

MRS DOWEY: 'Kenneth!' *she murmurs.*

KENNETH: 'What?' *he asks, no longer aware that she is taking a liberty.*

MRS DOWEY: 'Nothing,' *she says, 'just Kenneth,' and is off gleefully for the tea-caddy. But when his tea is poured out, and he has drunk a saucerful, the instinct of self-preservation returns to him between two bites.*

KENNETH: 'Don't you be thinking, missis, for one minute that you have got me.'

MRS DOWEY: 'No, no.'

On that understanding he unbends.

KENNETH: 'I have a theatre tonight, followed by a randy-dandy.'

MRS DOWEY: 'Oho! Kenneth, this is a queer first meeting!'

KENNETH: 'It is, woman, oh, it is,' guardedly, 'and it's also a last meeting.'

MRS DOWEY: 'Yes, yes.'

KENNETH: 'So here's to you — you old mop and pail. Ave atque vale.'

MRS DOWEY: 'What's that?'

KENNETH: 'That means Hail and Farewell.'

MRS DOWEY: 'Are you a scholar?'

KENNETH: 'Being Scotch, there's almost nothing I don't know.'

MRS DOWEY: 'What was you to trade?'

KENNETH: 'Carter, glazier, orraman, any rough jobs.'

MRS DOWEY: 'You're a proper man to look at.'

KENNETH: 'I'm generally admired.'

MRS DOWEY: 'She's an enviable woman.'

KENNETH: 'Who?'

MRS DOWEY: 'Your mother.'

KENNETH: 'Eh? Oh, that was just protecting myself from you. I have neither father nor mother nor wife nor grandmama.' *Bitterly*, 'This party never even knew who his proud parents were.'

MRS DOWEY: 'Is that' — *gleaming*— 'is that true?'

KENNETH: 'It's gospel.'

MRS DOWEY: 'Heaven be praised!'

KENNETH: 'Eh? None of that! I was a fool to tell you. But don't think you can take advantage of it. Pass the cake.'

MRS DOWEY: 'I daresay it's true we'll never meet again, Kenneth, but — but if we do, I wonder where it will be?'

KENNETH: 'Not in this world.'

MRS DOWEY: 'There's no telling' — *leering ingratiatingly*— 'It might be at Berlin.'

KENNETH: 'Tod, if I ever get to Berlin, I believe I'll find you there waiting for me!'

MRS DOWEY: 'With a cup of tea for you in my hand.'

KENNETH: 'Yes, and' — *heartily*— 'very good tea too.'

He has partaken heavily, he is now in high good humour.

MRS DOWEY: 'Kenneth, we could come back by Paris!'

KENNETH: 'All the ladies,' slapping his knees, 'likes to go to Paris.'

MRS DOWEY: 'Oh, Kenneth, Kenneth, if just once before I die I could be fitted for a Paris gown with dreamy corsage!'

KENNETH: 'You're all alike, old covey. We have a song about it.' He sings:

'Mrs. Gill is very ill,
Nothing can improve her
But to see the Tuileries
And waddle through the Louvre.'

No song ever had a greater success. Mrs. Dowey is doubled up with mirth. When she comes to, when they both come to, for there are a pair of them, she cries:

MRS DOWEY: 'You must learn me that,' and off she goes in song also:

'Mrs. Dowey's very ill,
Nothing can improve her.'

KENNETH: 'Stop!' and finishes the verse:

'But dressed up in a Paris gown

To waddle through the Louvre.’

They fling back their heads, she points at him, he points at her. She says ecstatically:

MRS DOWEY: ‘Hairy legs!’

A mad remark, which brings him to his senses; he remembers who and what she is.

KENNETH: ‘Mind your manners!’ *Rising*, ‘Well, thank you for my tea. I must be stepping.’

Poor Mrs. Dowey, he is putting on his kit.

MRS DOWEY: ‘Where are you living?’

KENNETH: *sighs*. ‘That’s the question. But there’s a place called The Hut, where some of the 2nd Battalion are. They’ll take me in. Beggars,’ bitterly, ‘can’t be choosers.’

MRS DOWEY: ‘Beggars?’

KENNETH: ‘I’ve never been here before. If you knew’ — *a shadow coming over him*—‘what it is to be in such a place without a friend. I was crazy with glee, when I got my leave, at the thought of seeing London at last, but after wandering its streets for four hours, I would almost have been glad to be back in the trenches.’

‘If you knew,’ he has said, but indeed the old lady knows.

MRS DOWEY: ‘That’s my quandorum too, Kenneth.’

KENNETH: *nods sympathetically*. ‘I’m sorry for you, you poor old body,’ *shouldering his kit*. ‘But I see no way out for either of us.’

MRS DOWEY: *in a cooing voice* ‘Do you not?’

KENNETH: ‘Are you at it again!’

She knows that it must be now or never. She has left her biggest guns for the end. In her excitement she is rising up and down on her toes.

MRS DOWEY: ‘Kenneth, I’ve heard that the thing a man on leave longs for more

than anything else is a bed with sheets, and a bath.'

KENNETH: 'You never heard anything truer.'

MRS DOWEY: 'Go into that pantry, Kenneth Dowe, and lift the dresser-top, and tell me what you see.'

He goes. There is an awful stillness. He returns, impressed.

KENNETH: 'It's a kind of a bath!'

MRS DOWEY: 'You could do yourself there pretty, half at a time.'

KENNETH: 'Me?'

MRS DOWEY: 'There's a woman through the wall that would be very willing to give me a shakedown till your leave is up.'

KENNETH: *snorts*. 'Oh, is there!'

She has not got him yet, but there is still one more gun.

MRS DOWEY: 'Kenneth, look!'

With these simple words she lets down the bed. She says no more; an effect like this would be spoiled by language. Fortunately he is not made of stone. He thrills.

KENNETH: 'My word! That's the dodge we need in the trenches.'

MRS DOWEY: '*That's your bed, Kenneth.*'

KENNETH: 'Mine?' He grins at her. 'You queer old divert. What can make you so keen to be burdened by a lump like me?'

MRS DOWEY: 'He! he! he! he!'

KENNETH: 'I tell you, I'm the commonest kind of man.'

MRS DOWEY: 'I'm just the commonest kind of old wifie myself.'

KENNETH: 'I've been a kick-about all my life, and I'm no great shakes at the war.'

MRS DOWEY: 'Yes, you are. How many Germans have you killed?'

KENNETH: 'Just two for certain, and there was no glory in it. It was just because they wanted my shirt.'

MRS DOWEY: 'Your shirt?'

KENNETH: 'Well, they said it was their shirt.'

MRS DOWEY: 'Have you took prisoners?'

KENNETH: 'I once took half a dozen, but that was a poor affair too.'

MRS DOWEY: 'How could one man take half a dozen?'

KENNETH: 'Just in the usual way. I surrounded them.'

MRS DOWEY: 'Kenneth, you're just my ideal.'

KENNETH: 'You're easily pleased.' *He turns again to the bed, 'Let's see how the thing works.' He kneads the mattress with his fist, and the result is so satisfactory that he puts down his kit.* 'Old lady, if you really want me, I'll bide.'

MRS DOWEY: 'Oh! oh! oh! oh!'

Her joy is so demonstrative that he has to drop a word of warning.

KENNETH: 'But, mind you, I don't accept you as a relation. For your personal glory, you can go on pretending to the neighbours; but the best I can say for you is that you're on your probation. I'm a cautious character, and we must see how you'll turn out.'

MRS DOWEY: 'Yes, Kenneth.'

KENNETH: 'And now, I think, for that bath. My theatre begins at six-thirty. A cove I met on a 'bus is going with me.'

She is a little alarmed.

MRS DOWEY: 'You're sure you'll come back?'

KENNETH: 'Yes, yes,' handsomely, 'I leave my kit in pledge.'

MRS DOWEY: ‘You won’t liquor up too freely, Kenneth?’

KENNETH: ‘You’re the first,’ chuckling, ‘to care whether I do or not.’ *Nothing she has said has pleased the lonely man so much as this.* ‘I promise. Tod, I’m beginning to look forward to being wakened in the morning by hearing you cry, “Get up, you lazy swine.” I’ve kind of envied men that had womenfolk with the right to say that.’

He is passing to the bathroom when a diverting notion strikes him.

MRS DOWEY: ‘What is it, Kenneth?’

KENNETH: ‘The theatre. It would be showier if I took a lady.’

Mrs. Dowey feels a thumping at her breast.

MRS DOWEY: ‘Kenneth, tell me this instant what you mean. Don’t keep me on the jumps.’

KENNETH: *turns her round.* ‘No, It couldn’t be done.’

MRS DOWEY: ‘Was it me you were thinking of?’

KENNETH: ‘Just for the moment,’ *regretfully*, ‘but you have no style.’

She catches hold of him by the sleeve.

MRS DOWEY: ‘Not in this, of course. But, oh, Kenneth, if you saw me in my merino! It’s laced up the back in the very latest.’

KENNETH: ‘Hum,’ *doubtfully*; ‘but let’s see it.’

It is produced from a drawer, to which the old lady runs with almost indecent haste. The connoisseur examines it critically.

KENNETH: ‘Looks none so bad. Have you a bit of chiffon for the neck? It’s not bombs nor Kaisers nor Tipperary that men in the trenches think of, it’s chiffon.’

MRS DOWEY: ‘I swear I have, Kenneth, And I have a bangle, and a muff, and gloves.’

KENNETH: ‘Ay, ay.’ *He considers.* ‘Do you think you could give your face less of a homely look?’

MRS DOWEY: 'I'm sure I could.'

KENNETH: 'Then you can have a try. But, mind you, I promise nothing. All will depend on the effect.'

He goes into the pantry, and the old lady is left alone. Not alone, for she is ringed round by entrancing hopes and dreadful fears. They beam on her and jeer at her, they pull her this way and that; with difficulty she breaks through them and rushes to her pail, hot water, soap, and a looking-glass. Our last glimpse of her for this evening shows her staring (not discontentedly) at her soft old face, licking her palm, and pressing it to her hair. Her eyes are sparkling.

One evening a few days later Mrs. Twymley and Mrs. Mickleham are in Mrs. Dowey's house, awaiting that lady's return from some fashionable dissipation. They have undoubtedly been discussing the war, for the first words we catch are:

MRS. MICKLEHAM. 'I tell you flat, Amelia, I bows no knee to junkerdom.'

MRS. TWYMLEY. 'Sitting here by the fire, you and me, as one to another, what do you think will happen after the war? Are we to go back to being as we were?'

MRS. MICKLEHAM. 'Speaking for myself, Amelia, not me. The war has wakened me up to a understanding of my own importance that is really astonishing.'

MRS. TWYMLEY. 'Same here. Instead of being the poor worms the like of you and me thought we was, we turns out to be visible departments of a great and haughty empire.'

They are well under weigh, and with a little luck we might now hear their views on various passing problems of the day, such as the neglect of science in our public schools. But in comes the Haggerty Woman, and spoils everything. She is attired, like them, in her best, but the effect of her is that her clothes have gone out for a walk, leaving her at home.

MRS. MICKLEHAM, *with deep distaste*, 'Here's that submarine again.'

The Haggerty Woman cringes to them, but gets no encouragement.

THE HAGGERTY WOMAN. 'It's a terrible war.'

MRS. TWYMLEY. 'Is that so?'

THE HAGGERTY WOMAN. 'I wonder what will happen when it ends?'

MRS. MICKLEHAM. 'I have no idea.'

The intruder produces her handkerchief, but does not use it. After all, she is in her best.

THE HAGGERTY WOMAN. 'Are they not back yet?'

Perfect ladies must reply to a direct question.

MRS. MICKLEHAM. 'No,' icily. 'We have been waiting this half hour. They are at the theatre again.'

THE HAGGERTY WOMAN. 'You tell me! I just popped in with an insignificant present for him, as his leave is up.'

MRS. TWYMLEY. 'The same errand brought us.'

THE HAGGERTY WOMAN. 'My present is cigarettes.'

They have no intention of telling her what their presents are, but the secret leaps from them.

MRS. MICKLEHAM. 'So is mine.'

MRS. TWYMLEY. 'Mine too.'

Triumph of the Haggerty Woman. But it is short-lived.

MRS. MICKLEHAM. 'Mine has gold tips.'

MRS. TWYMLEY. 'So has mine.'

The Haggerty Woman need not say a word. You have only to look at her to know that her cigarettes are not gold-tipped. She tries to brazen it out, which is so often a mistake.

THE HAGGERTY WOMAN. 'What care I? Mine is Exquisytos.'

No wonder they titter.

MRS. MICKLEHAM. 'Excuse us, Mrs. Haggerty (if that's your name), but the word

is Exquiseetos.’

THE HAGGERTY WOMAN. ‘Much obliged’ (*weeps*).

MRS. MICKLEHAM. ‘I think I heard a taxi.’

MRS. TWYMLEY. ‘It will be her third this week.’

They peer through the blind. They are so excited that rank is forgotten.

THE HAGGERTY WOMAN. ‘What is she in?’

MRS. MICKLEHAM. ‘A new astrakhan jacket he gave her, with Venus sleeves.’

THE HAGGERTY WOMAN. ‘Has she sold her gabardine coat?’

MRS. MICKLEHAM. ‘Not her! She has them both at the theatre, warm night though it is. She’s wearing the astrakhan, and carrying the gabardine, flung careless-like over her arm.’

THE HAGGERTY WOMAN. ‘I saw her strutting about with him yesterday, looking as if she thought the two of them made a procession.’

MRS. TWYMLEY. ‘Hsh!’ *peeping*, ‘Strike me dead, if she’s not coming mincing down the stair, hooked on his arm!’

Indeed it is thus that Mrs. Dowey enters. Perhaps she had seen shadows lurking on the blind, and at once hooked on to Kenneth to impress the visitors. She is quite capable of it.

Now we see what Kenneth saw that afternoon five days ago when he emerged from the bathroom and found the old trembler awaiting his inspection. Here are the muff and the gloves and the chiffon, and such a kind old bonnet that it makes you laugh at once; I don’t know how to describe it, but it is trimmed with a kiss, as bonnets should be when the wearer is old and frail. We must take the merino for granted until she steps out of the astrakhan. She is dressed up to the nines, there is no doubt about it. Yes, but is her face less homely? Above all, has she style? The answer is in a stout affirmative. Ask Kenneth. He knows. Many a time he has had to go behind a door to roar hilariously at the old lady. He has thought of her as a lark to tell his mates about by and by; but for some reason that he cannot fathom, he knows now that he will never do that.

MRS. DOWEY: ‘Kenneth,’ affecting surprise, ‘we have visitors!’

DOWEY: 'Your servant, ladies.'

He is no longer mud-caked and dour. A very smart figure is this Private Dowey, and he winks engagingly at the visitors, like one who knows that for jolly company you cannot easily beat charwomen. The pleasantries that he and they have exchanged this week! The sauce he has given them. The wit of Mrs. Mickleham's retorts. The badinage of Mrs. Twymley. The neat giggles of the Haggerty Woman. There has been nothing like it since you took the countess in to dinner.

MRS. TWYMLEY. 'We should apologise. We're not meaning to stay.'

MRS. DOWEY. 'You are very welcome. Just wait' — *the ostentation of this!*— 'till I get out of my astrakhan — and my muff — and my gloves — and' (*it is the bonnet's turn now*) 'my Excelsior.'

At last we see her in the merino (a triumph).

MRS. MICKLEHAM. 'You've given her a glory time, Mr. Dowey.'

KENNETH. 'It's her that has given it to me, missis.'

MRS. DOWEY. 'Hey! hey! hey! hey! He just pampers me,' *wagging her fists.* 'The Lord forgive us, but this being the last night, we had a sit-down supper at a restaurant!' *Vehemently:* 'I swear by God that we had champagne wine.' *There is a dead stillness, and she knows very well what it means, she has even prepared for it:* 'And to them as doubts my word — here's the cork.'

She places the cork, in its lovely gold drapery, upon the table.

MRS. MICKLEHAM. 'I'm sure!'

MRS. TWYMLEY. 'I would thank you, Mrs. Dowey, not to say a word against my Alfred.'

MRS. DOWEY. 'Me!'

KENNETH: 'Come, come, ladies,' *in the masterful way that is so hard for women to resist:* 'if you say another word, I'll kiss the lot of you.'

There is a moment of pleased confusion.

MRS. MICKLEHAM. 'Really, them sodgers!'

THE HAGGERTY WOMAN. 'The kilties is the worst!'

MRS. TWYMLEY. 'I'm sure,' heartily, 'we don't grudge you your treats, Mrs. Dowey; and sorry we are that this is the end.'

KENNETH: 'Yes, it's the end,' *with a troubled look at his old lady*; 'I must be off in ten minutes.'

The little soul is too gallant to break down in company. She hurries into the pantry and shuts the door.

MRS. MICKLEHAM. 'Poor thing! But we must run, for you'll be having some last words to say to her.'

KENNETH: 'I kept her out long on purpose so as to have less time to say them in.'

He more than half wishes that he could make a bolt to a public-house.

MRS. TWYMLEY. 'It's the best way.' *In the important affairs of life there is not much that any one can teach a charwoman.* 'Just a mere nothing, to wish you well, Mr. Dowey.'

All three present him with the cigarettes.

MRS. MICKLEHAM. 'A scraping, as one might say.'

THE HAGGERTY WOMAN. 'The heart,' *enigmatically*, 'is warm though it may not be gold-tipped.'

KENNETH: 'You bricks!'

THE LADIES. 'Good luck, cocky.'

KENNTNTH: 'The same to you. And if you see a sodger man up there in a kilt, he is one that is going back with me. Tell him not to come down, but — but to give me till the last minute, and then to whistle.'

It is quite a grave man who is left alone, thinking what to do next. He tries a horse laugh, but that proves of no help. He says 'Hell!' to himself, but it is equally ineffective. Then he opens the pantry door and calls.

KENNETH: 'Old lady.'

She comes timidly to the door, her hand up as if to ward off a blow.

MRS DOWEY: 'Is it time?'

An encouraging voice answers her.

KENNETH: 'No, no, not yet. I've left word for Dixon to whistle when go I must.'

MRS DOWEY: 'All is ended.'

KENNETH: 'Now, then, you promised to be gay. We were to help one another.'

MRS DOWEY: 'Yes, Kenneth.'

KENNETH: 'It's bad for me, but it's worse for you.'

MRS DOWEY: 'The men have medals to win, you see.'

KENNETH: 'The women have their medals, too.' *He knows she likes him to order her about, so he tries it again. 'Come here. No, I'll come to you.' He stands gaping at her wonderingly. He has no power of words, nor does he quite know what he would like to say. 'God!'*

MRS DOWEY: 'What is it, Kenneth?'

KENNETH: 'You're a woman.'

MRS DOWEY: 'I had near forgot it.'

He wishes he was at the station with Dixon. Dixon is sure to have a bottle in his pocket. They will be roaring a song presently. But in the meantime — there is that son business. Blethers, the whole thing, of course — or mostly blethers. But it's the way to please her.

KENNETH: 'Have you noticed you have never called me son?'

MRS DOWEY: 'Have I noticed it! I was feared, Kenneth. You said I was on probation.'

KENNETH: 'And so you were. Well, the probation's ended.' *He laughs uncomfortably. 'The like of me! But if you want me you can have me.'*

MRS DOWEY: 'Kenneth, will I do?'

KENNETH: 'Woman,' *artfully gay*, 'don't be so forward. Wait till I have proposed.'

MRS DOWEY: 'Propose for a mother?'

KENNETH: 'What for no?' In the grand style, 'Mrs. Dowey, you queer carl, you spunky tiddy, have I your permission to ask you the most important question a neglected orphan can ask of an old lady?'

She bubbles with mirth. Who could help it, the man has such a way with him.

MRS DOWEY: 'None of your sauce, Kenneth.'

KENNETH: 'For a long time, Mrs. Dowey, you cannot have been unaware of my sonnish feelings for you.'

MRS DOWEY: 'Wait till I get my mop to you!'

KENNETH: 'And if you're not willing to be my mother, I swear I'll never ask another.'

The old divert pulls him down to her and strokes his hair.

KENNETH: 'Was I a well-behaved infant, mother?'

MRS DOWEY: 'Not you, sonny, you were a rampaging rogue.'

KENNETH: 'Was I slow in learning to walk?'

MRS DOWEY: 'The quickest in our street. He! he! he!' *She starts up.* 'Was that the whistle?'

KENNETH: 'No, no. See here. In taking me over you have, in a manner of speaking, joined the Black Watch.'

MRS DOWEY: 'I like to think that, Kenneth.'

KENNETH: 'Then you must behave so that the ghost piper can be proud of you. 'Tion!' *She stands bravely at attention.* 'That's the style. Now listen, I've sent in your name as being my nearest of kin, and your allowance will be coming to you weekly in the usual way.'

MRS DOWEY: 'Hey! hey! hey! Is it wicked, Kenneth?'

KENNETH: 'I'll take the responsibility for it in both worlds. You see, I want you to be safeguarded in case anything hap—'

MRS DOWEY: 'Kenneth!'

KENNETH: 'Tion! Have no fear. I'll come back, covered with mud and medals. Mind you have that cup of tea waiting for me.' He is listening for the whistle. He pulls her on to his knee.

MRS DOWEY: 'Hey! hey! hey! hey!'

KENNETH: 'What fun we'll have writing to one another! Real letters this time!'

MRS DOWEY: 'Yes.'

KENNETH: 'It would be a good plan if you began the first letter as soon as I've gone.'

MRS DOWEY: 'I will.'

KENNETH: 'I hope Lady Dolly will go on sending me cakes.'

MRS DOWEY: 'You may be sure.'

He ties his scarf round her neck.

KENNETH: 'You must have been a bonny thing when you were young.'

MRS DOWEY: 'Away with you!'

KENNETH: 'That scarf sets you fine.'

MRS DOWEY: 'Blue was always my colour.'

The whistle sounds.

KENNETH: 'Old lady, you are what Blighty means to me now.'

She hides in the pantry again. She is out of sight to us, but she does something that makes Private Dowe take off his bonnet. Then he shoulders his equipment and departs. That is he laughing coarsely with Dixon.

We have one last glimpse of the old lady — a month or two after Kenneth's death in action. It would be rosemary to us to see her in her black dress, of which she is very proud; but let us rather peep at her in the familiar garments that make a third to her mop and pail. It is early morning, and she is having a look at her medals before setting off on the daily round. They are in a drawer, with the scarf covering them, and on the scarf a piece of lavender. First, the black frock, which she carries in her arms like a baby. Then her War Savings Certificates, Kenneth's bonnet, a thin packet of real letters, and the famous champagne cork. She kisses the letters, but she does not blub over them. She strokes the dress, and waggles her head over the certificates and presses the bonnet to her cheeks, and rubs the tinsel of the cork carefully with her apron. She is a tremulous old 'un; yet she exults, for she owns all these things, and also the penny flag on her breast. She puts them away in the drawer, the scarf over them, the lavender on the scarf. Her air of triumph well becomes her. She lifts the pail and the mop, and slouches off gamely to the day's toil.

A WELL REMEMBERED VOICE

COMMENTARY

A Well-Remembered Voice had one matinee performance on 28 June 1918 (ironically exactly four years after the assassination of Franz Ferdinand), at Wyndham's Theatre as part of a charity fundraiser for Lady Lytton's Hospital. It was well supported by celebrities and the aristocracy. In his book, *J. M. Barrie and the Theatre* H. M. Walbrook noted: '*in the June of 1918, an enthralling little piece called A Well-remembered Voice was produced at Wyndham's*'

He further refers to it as a '*beautiful little piece... a playlet written around the new Spiritualism which brought so much comfort during the War years.*'

Barrie being Barrie, uses spiritualism and plays with it to great effect. Walbrook continues:

'The acting of Sir J. Forbes Robertson as the father in this exquisite little play created an ineffaceable impression, while the gentle but very telling irony in the play at the expense of the crude spiritualism of which we heard so much during the great war reminded the audience that Sir James Barrie is not only one of our most imaginative writers but also one of our sane ones.'

A review for *The Times* mentions the play thus:

'And then art happened in downright earnest, an art of exquisite delicacy and reticence, an art which might be called the quintessence of Barrie. It is art that interprets "the sense of tears in human things," yet is never lachrymose, is in fact, a resolute protest against tears, a quiet denial of the bitterness of death—art in short, that, if the old Aristotelian theory were not now out fashion, might rank as a real cathartic.'

Barrie himself wrote in his notebook that: '*Well Remembered Voice which has made quite a stir—its message that the living must continue to live, even joyfully, in the face of such losses, was not lost on the audience.*'

A modern audience can perhaps speculate about whether Barrie was trying to convince not just his audience, but himself.

Barrie's biographer Mackail wrote: '*in A Well-Remembered Voice there was found, at this still well-chosen moment, another genuine and moving contribution to Barrie's interpretation of the war.*'

The play certainly made an impact on those who saw it.

It is almost impossible not to see *A Well Remembered Voice* in the context of the earlier 'Echoes' play *The New Word* – the two plays sit like bookends as explorations of the impact of war on middle class families. Or perhaps seeing them as a pair of curtains which somehow must be drawn together is a better analogy. In *The New Word* the death of the Second Lieutenant Roger Torrance is foreshadowed; in *A Well-Remembered Voice* Barrie deals with the effect the death of Second Lieutenant Dick Don has on his family.

In the process, Barrie gives an insight into war beyond the fighting and beyond the grave, exposing a sense of the futility and the loss. Most potently the veil between the living and the dead is explored in all its awful fragility.

The play opens in the darkness of her husband's painting studio, as Mrs. Don gathers two of her friends and Laura, the young woman who almost married her son, for a séance. The darkness suggests both the grief that the Don family suffers and their inability to let go of the dead.

Spiritualism was governed by the supposition that the dead cannot depart until they have returned to comfort the living. Thus it became particularly appropriate in the context of the war. Having placed their future hopes in the generation of soldiers who had fought the war and had died, the bereaved felt adrift. A responsibility had been imposed on the dead and through Spiritualism many people sought to reconnect with the dead in order to receive the permission to go on living.

It was a particular (and we may think peculiar) way to grieve. Most notably of Barrie's own friends and contemporaries, Arthur Conan Doyle became obsessively spiritualist. The impact war grief was also seen on others: Rudyard Kipling's poem 'My Boy Jack' shows how haunted he was by his loss. Barrie himself had suffered the devastating loss in the trenches of his own adopted son George. He would never recover from this tragedy although there were more (and worse) to come soon enough. Recent grief is therefore the immediate context of the play.

If we can see Barrie's relationship with George (and his siblings) in *The New Word*, we cannot escape but seeing it in *A Well Remembered Voice*, this time perhaps in an even more potent form. Barrie had, in a real sense, crossed his own personal rubicon in the time between the two plays.

Whereas *The New Word* focused on types of hope, this play looks at types of grief. The role of spiritualism in acceptance and agnosticism as denial are subtly examined from the very beginning.

Communication

Communication, or lack of it, is central to the play. While in *The New Word* we look at words, here we sense that communication has in some sense become broken or fractured. As the play opens we see Mrs. Don, longing to communicate with her son Dick who was killed five months previously, probably in the winter of 1917/1918. Her chosen medium is the séance. That words are spelled out tortuously and meaning has to be 'guessed' is symbolically telling.

Reminiscent of *The New Word* however, here we see that once again the more powerful relationship is that between father and son. Lost in his grief, Mr Don also longs to communicate. He cannot storm the emotional trench with his son as Mr Torrance did because here we are dealing with communication beyond the grave. Mr Don has missed his chance. He holds on to his son only through a version of denial afforded by his agnosticism. Not for him the comfort of the séance. Instead he is somewhat obsessed with reading about death in the papers – a vicarious mode

of grieving and a way of validating his loss. Words still play a part in both parents grief but we sense a disconnect as both parents seek a vicarious way to hold on to his relationship.

But Barrie goes deeper. Words still have a huge part to play. The power of words to hurt unintentionally is clearly shown as Mrs Don leaves to go to comfort Laura, with a parting comment:

'In a sense you may be glad that you don't miss him in the way I do.'

The distance between husband and wife (which we saw in *The New Word* was based on understanding of words) is here the distance of grief, evidenced by belief rather than word - although the constituent part of words, letters, are a conduit for exploring, perhaps exposing, the distance that is at least in part brought about by grief. The 'unspeakable' words now have an even greater poignancy than in the earlier play because they represent the barrier between life and death.

Mrs Don jumps to the wrong conclusion as easily as Mrs Torrance before her - convinced that the words F A being tapped out are a sign that Mr Don is providing a barrier to her communication with her son. In a sense, she is correct, but Barrie shows this to be much more subtle than she imagines.

Once again the superficial charm and humour of the play to some degree masks a darker message - of despair. Whether Barrie offers hope at the end of the play is uncertain - the ending of this play is very open. We should remember that this play is not a retrospective of The Great War, because the war was still going on at the time it was written and performed.

The Veil

The central image of this play is undoubtedly 'the veil.' This is not fully explored until Mr Don is alone. At this point his emotions take control and he cries. The poignancy of this is enough to trigger the 'well remembered voice.'

The deceased Dick Don appears. Mr Don's first response is to get his wife. But his son stops him by pointing out that he can only come to one, and that he has chosen his father. His message is that he wants his family to be cheerful. In this sense the play offers comfort and suggests that people best respect the dead by living to the full.

Barrie scholar Jenna Kubly suggests: *'In A Well-Remembered Voice, Barrie's message is that despite the cost, the possibility of moving on existed. Yet at the same time, Barrie is also acknowledging that humans are not always as resilient as they would like to think themselves; the human spirit is also remarkably fragile.'*

How possible this is in reality is questionable. It often feels like Barrie is giving out a message he wants to believe - as if by writing the words it will make them true.

The great strength of this play, for me, lies in the duality of message and purpose which making it perhaps the most poignant play I have encountered. *A Well Remembered Voice* considers the nature of life, but more than that, it is certainly an exploration of grief. This is at its most obvious and potent in the

dialogue between Dick and his father. So often they are talking at cross purposes. The fragility of communication is exposed.

Dick wants his father to move on past grief and Mr Don needs to move beyond denial towards, then through, grief, towards acceptance. We understand it is this visitation from his son that may help him achieve such movement.

As the men reminisce about the past in a light-hearted manner that would make us forget the enormity of the situation if we did not remember that Dick is a 'ghost' or 'spirit', Barrie seems to offer a way to move on, but the enormity of how to achieve this in the real world still eludes the characters (and perhaps Barrie himself)

I suggest what we see most clearly here is how no one is able to comprehend the nature of their own grief (including Barrie.)

When Dick explains to his father that they—the dead—can only come to see one person at one time and he has chosen to come see his father we understand the depth of their relationship – beyond words.

Dick is pleased to hear that his father is attempting to not give in to grief. "*We like that,*" he tells his father, for all the soldiers who have died.

While from beyond the grave Dick can take a positive view of death, he initially misunderstands his father's words, "*I said I wouldn't give in,*" as a statement that his father has moved beyond grief. Again Barrie exposes the limitations of words as communicative tools.

Whereas at the beginning of the war the sense was of 'the new' in all its aspects, by the end of the war grieving for the 'old' which had been lost; both in the sense of life, 'innocence' and indeed social structures; was predominant and is central to this play. A generation and a way of life have been lost. As has innocence. Those who set off to war as an adventure have now endured the horrors of the trenches.

We laugh, almost despite ourselves as Barrie wraps his pathos in light humour. Dick says:

'Haven't you got over it yet, father? I got over it so long ago. I wish you people would understand what a little thing it is.'

But we still find it hard to reconcile his position. As Dick talks about the veil that hangs between the living and the dead, he suggests that the veil is very thin, with all the soldiers on the Front existing precariously from moment to moment in a state between living and dying.

'The veil's a rummy thing, father. Yes, like a mist. But when one has been at the Front for a bit, you can't think how thin the veil seems to get; just one layer of it. I suppose it seems thin because one step takes you through it. We sometimes mix up those who have gone through and those who haven't. I daresay if I were to go back to my old battalion the living chaps would just nod to me.'

Then, in an attempt to comfort his father (and Barrie, and his audience?) Dick gives a monologue about his own death.

'When I came to, the veil was so thin that I couldn't see at all; and my first

thought was, Which side of it have I come out on? The living ones lying on the ground were asking that about themselves, too. There we all were, all sitting up and asking whether we were alive or dead; and some were one, and some were the other. Sort of fluke, you know.'

This forces the audience to consider life and death – the humour belies a much deeper consideration. It is especially powerful on stage because of the actual corporeality of Dick (the actor) in front of our eyes. We know he is a ghost through the context of the play, but we are confronted with his physical presence, giving us a poignant understanding of the actuality of grief.

Barrie seeks to show that on the other side of the veil the dead can take a positive view of death, but he cannot resolve things for the living for whom death remains the final unknown. Despite attempting to realise the chasm that divides the mentality of the dead and the living, we wonder whether Barrie can bring himself to believe it.

Today we have become used to the idea that many people involved in the First and Second World Wars never spoke about it. In this play, Dick offers a plausible albeit fanciful suggestion. He claims the dead are fined for talking about the war. Underlying this, we get the clear sense that the past should be left in the past - though how this squares with dealing and then moving beyond grief is a moot point.

By 1917 when this play was performed the gung-ho, anti-German sentiment of the early days has long gone and Barrie suggests a more realistic understanding of the cost of war, indicating that the concept of 'the enemy' in terms of real people is unimportant. It takes the dead to explain this to the living:

Dick: On the other side of the veil, the war has already slipped in to the past. "And you know—those fellows we were fighting—I forgot who they were?"

Mr Don: "The Germans,"

Dick: 'Oh yes. Some of them were on the same side of the veil with us, and they were rather decent; so we chummed up in the end and [we went] away together.'

Barrie seeks to relieve the pressure by having Dick talk about the commonplace, domesticity of the life he's left behind. While at times humorous, this is ultimately even more poignant as it reveals just how fragile life is.

In *A Well Remembered Voice* Barrie suggests that the dead cannot go happily to their reward (presumably a version of heaven) until the families let go and stop grieving. This message is doubtless well intentioned, but suggests grief is tied up with guilt and that letting go is a double edged sword.

Both father and son have to confront what they have lost. In case we forget that Dick is not 'real' Barrie brings in Laura and Mrs Don which serves to remind us of his status as ghost. There is a deal more poignancy than humour in this.

At the end, Barrie places yet another opposition, turning the tables from the expected once more. Dick speaks in conscious imitation of a father giving advice to his son:

"Look here, sonny, you've got to go on with it. You don't seem to know how interested I am in your future."

Mr. Don promises he will try, but stops, asking “*Would you rather be—here—than there?*”

It is the question perhaps we all want answered but dare not ask. Dick hesitates, but answers that he would rather still be “here”; he thinks “*it must be rather jolly*” to know one still has “*risks to run*” on earth.

Here darkness threatens to blot out the fragile light. Mr. Don realizes that even his son, who had seemed so cheerful and carefree, has doubts. The pain is palpable as he asks: “*And your gaiety, Dick’ is it all real, or only put on to help me?*”

Once again, Dick hesitates, before answering, “*It’s—it’s half and half, father.*”

Abruptly, he commands them both to smile, refusing to dwell on the other half—the part of him that regrets his own death. As he fades from sight, Dick’s voice can be heard saying, “*Be bright.*”

Mr. Don is left alone again to consider everything his son has told him.

And we, as audience are left to draw our own conclusions. Some have seen a hope embedded in this ending, but others (myself included) see ‘brightness’ as dimmed. Either way, Barrie pulls no punches in his emotional depth. While emotional exchanges of words between living men may be an embarrassment, Barrie uses words and the images they create on stage, to devastating effect and we suspect great personal cost. As an ‘echo’ of the past this play rings out in the dark with a painful, truthful honesty.

A Well Remembered Voice is perhaps one of Barrie’s least remembered plays. Perhaps we are still uncomfortably unable to cope with the exploration of personal grief it contains. It is a shame because it is a brave play, unbearably poignant and importantly ‘real.’ Shining light into dark places is painful but sometimes necessary.

A WELL-REMEMBERED VOICE

Cast:

Mr Don (50)

Mrs Don (middle aged)

Mr Rogers (middle aged)

Major Armitage (60s)

Laura Bell (20s)

Dick Don (20s)

Out of the darkness comes the voice of a woman speaking to her dead son.

MRS DON: 'But that was against your wish, was it not? Was that against your wish? Would you prefer me not to ask that question?'

The room is so dark that we cannot see her. All we know is that she is one of four shapes gathered round a small table. Beyond the darkness is a great ingle-nook, in which is seated on a settle a man of fifty. Him we can discern fitfully by the light of the fire. It is not sufficiently bright to enable him to read, but an evening paper lies on his knee. He seems wistful and meek. He is paying no attention to the party round the table. When he hears their voices it is only as empty sounds.

The mother continues.

MRS DON: 'Perhaps I am putting the question in the wrong way. Are you not able to tell us any more?'

A man's voice breaks in.

MAJOR: 'There was a distinct movement that time, but it is so irregular.'

MRS DON: 'I thought so, but please don't talk. Do you want to tell us more? Is it that you can't hear me distinctly? He seems to want to tell us more, but something prevents him.'

MAJOR: 'In any case, Mrs. Don, it is extraordinary. This is the first séance I have ever taken part in, but I must believe now.'

MRS DON: 'Of course, Major, these are the simplest manifestations. They are only the first step. But if we are to go on, the less we talk the better. Shall we go on? It is not agitating you too much, Laura?'

LAURA: 'There was a moment when I — but I wish I was braver. I think it is partly

the darkness. I suppose we can't have a little light?'

MRS DON: 'Certainly we can, dear. Darkness is quite unnecessary, but I think it helps one to concentrate.'

The Major lights a lamp, and though it casts shadows we see now that the room is an artist's studio. The silent figure in the ingle-nook is the artist. Mrs. Don is his wife, the two men are Major Armitage and an older friend, Mr. Rogers. The girl is Laura Bell. These four are sitting round the table, their hands touching: they are endeavouring to commune with one who has 'crossed the gulf.'

The Major and Mr. Rogers are but passing shadows in the play, and even nice Laura is only to flit across its few pages for a moment on her way to happier things. We scarcely notice them in the presence of Mrs. Don, the gracious, the beautiful, the sympathetic, whose magnetic force and charm are such that we wish to sit at her feet at once. She is intellectual, but with a disarming smile, religious, but so charitable, masterful, and yet loved of all. None is perfect, and there must be a flaw in her somewhere, but to find it would necessitate such a rummage among her many adornments as there is now no time for. Perhaps we may come upon it accidentally in the course of the play.

She is younger than Mr. Don, who, despite her efforts for many years to cover his deficiencies, is a man of no great account in a household where the bigger personality of his wife swallows him like an Aaron's rod. Mr. Don's deficiencies! She used to try very hard, or fairly hard, to conceal them from Dick; but Dick knew. His mother was his chum. All the lovely things which happened in that house in the days when Dick was alive were between him and her; those two shut the door softly on old Don, always anxious not to hurt his feelings, and then ran into each other's arms. In the better light Mr. Don is now able to read his paper if he chooses. If he has forgotten the party at the table, they have equally forgotten him.

MRS. DON: 'You have not gone away, have you? We must be patient. Are you still there?'

ROGERS: 'I think I felt a movement.'

MRS. DON: 'Don't talk, please. Are you still there?'

The table moves.

Mrs DON: 'Yes! It is your mother who is speaking; do you understand that?'

The table moves.

MRS DON: 'Yes. What shall I ask him now?'

ROGERS: 'We leave it to you, Mrs. Don.'

MRS. DON: 'Have you any message you want to send us? Yes. Is it important? Yes. Are we to spell it out in the usual way? Yes. Is the first letter of the first word A? Is it B?'

She continues through the alphabet to L, when the table responds. Similarly she finds that the second letter is O.

MRS DON: 'Is the word Love? Yes. But I don't understand that movement. You are not displeased with us, are you? No. Does the second word begin with A? — with B? Yes.'

The second word is spelt out Bade and the third Me.

MRS DON: 'Love Bade Me — If it is a quotation, I believe I know it! Is the fourth word Welcome? Yes.'

LAURA: 'Love Bade Me Welcome.'

MRS. DON: 'That movement again! Don't you want me to go on?'

LAURA: 'Let us stop.'

MRS. DON: 'Not unless he wishes it. Why are those words so important? Does the message end there? Is anyone working against you? Some one antagonistic? Yes. Not one of ourselves surely? No. Is it any one we know? Yes. Can I get the name in the usual way? Yes. Is the first letter of this person's name A? — B? — —'

It proves to be F. One begins to notice a quaint peculiarity of Mrs. Don's. She is so accustomed to homage that she expects a prompt response even from the shades.

MRS DON: 'Is the second letter A?'

The table moves.

MRS DON: 'FA. Fa — — ?'

She is suddenly enlightened.

MRS DON: 'Is the word Father? Yes.'

They all turn and look for the first time at Mr. Don. He has heard, and rises

apologetically.

MR. DON, distressed: 'I had no intention — Should I go away, Grace?'

She answers sweetly without a trace of the annoyance she must surely feel.

MRS. DON: 'Perhaps you had better, Robert.'

ROGERS: 'I suppose it is because he is an unbeliever? He is not openly antagonistic, is he?'

MRS. DON: *sadly enough*, 'I am afraid he is.' *They tend to discuss the criminal as if he was not present.*

MAJOR: 'But he must admit that we do get messages.'

MRS. DON: *reluctantly*, 'He says we think we do. He says they would not want to communicate with us if they had such trivial things to say.'

ROGERS: 'But we are only on the threshold, Don. This is just a beginning.'

LAURA: 'Didn't you hear, Mr. Don—"Love Bade Me Welcome"?'

MR. DON: 'Does that strike you as important, Laura?'

LAURA: 'He said it was.'

MRS. DON: 'It might be very important to him, though we don't understand why.'

She speaks gently, but there is an obstinacy in him, despite his meekness.

MR. DON: 'I didn't mean to be antagonistic, Grace. I thought. I wasn't thinking of it at all.'

MRS. DON: 'Not thinking of Dick, Robert? And it was only five months ago!'

MR. DON: *who is somehow, without meaning it, always in the wrong*, 'I'll go.'

ROGERS: 'A boy wouldn't turn his father out. Ask him.'

MR. DON: *forlornly*, 'As to that — as to that — —'

MRS. DON: 'I will ask him if you wish me to, Robert.'

MR. DON: 'No, don't.'

ROGERS: 'It can't worry you as you are a disbeliever.'

MR. DON: 'No, but — I shouldn't like you to think that he sent me away.'

ROGERS: 'He won't. Will he, Mrs. Don?'

MR. DON: *knowing what her silence implies*, 'You see, Dick and I were not very — no quarrel or anything of that sort — but I, I didn't much matter to Dick. I'm too old, perhaps.'

MRS. DON: *gently*, 'I won't ask him, Robert, if you would prefer me not to.'

MR. DON: 'I'll go.'

MRS. DON: 'I'm afraid it is too late now.' *She turns away from earthly things*. 'Do you want me to break off?'

The table moves.

MRS DON: 'Yes. Do you send me your love, Dick? Yes. And to Laura? Yes.' *She raises her eyes to Don, and hesitates*. 'Shall I ask him — ?'

MR. DON: 'No, no, don't.'

ROGERS: 'It would be all right, Don.'

MR. DON: 'I don't know.'

They leave the table.

LAURA: *a little agitated*, 'May I go to my room, Mrs. Don? I feel I — should like to be alone.'

MRS. DON: 'Yes, yes, Laura dear. I shall come in and see you.'

Laura bids them good-night and goes. She likes Mr. Don, she strokes his hand when he holds it out to her, but she can't help saying,

LAURA: 'Oh, Mr. Don, how could you?'

ROGERS: 'I think we must all want to be alone after such an evening. I shall say

good-night, Mrs. Don.'

MAJOR: 'Same here. I go your way, Rogers, but you will find me a silent companion. One doesn't want to talk ordinary things to-night. Rather not. Thanks, awfully.'

ROGERS: 'Good-night, Don. It's a pity, you know; a bit hard on your wife.'

MR. DON: 'Good-night, Rogers. Good-night, Major.'

The husband and wife, left together, have not much to say to each other. He is depressed because he has spoilt things for her. She is not angry. She knows that he can't help being as he is, and that there are fine spaces in her mind where his thoughts can never walk with her. But she would forgive him seventy times seven because he is her husband. She is standing looking at a case of fishing-rods against the wall. There is a Jock Scott still sticking in one of them. Mr. Don says, as if somehow they were evidence against him:

MR DON: 'Dick's fishing-rods.'

MRS DON: *She says forgivingly*, 'I hope you don't mind my keeping them in the studio, Robert. They are sacred things to me.'

MR DON: 'That's all right, Grace.'

MRS DON: 'I think I shall go to Laura now.'

MR DON: 'Yes,' *in his inexpressive way*.

MRS DON: 'Poor child!'

MR DON: 'I'm afraid I hurt her.'

MRS DON: 'Dick wouldn't have liked it — but Dick's gone.' *She looks a little wonderingly at him. After all these years, she can sometimes wonder a little still.* 'I suppose you will resume your evening paper!'

MR DON: *answers quietly, but with the noble doggedness which is the reason why we write this chapter in his life.* 'Why not, Grace?'

MRS DON: *considers, for she is so sure that she must know the answer better than he.* 'I suppose it is just that a son is so much more to a mother than to a father.'

MR DON: 'I daresay.'

MRS DON: *A little gust of passion shakes her.* 'How you can read about the war nowadays!'

MR DON: *says firmly to her — he has had to say it a good many times to himself,* 'I'm not going to give in.' *But he adds,* 'I am so sorry I was in the way, Grace. I wasn't scouting you, or anything of that sort. It's just that I can't believe in it.'

MRS DON: 'Ah, Robert, you would believe if Dick had been to you what he was to me.'

MR DON: 'I don't know.'

MRS DON: 'In a sense you may be glad that you don't miss him in the way I do.'

MR DON: 'Yes, perhaps.'

MRS DON: 'Good-night, Robert.'

MR DON: 'Good-night, dear.'

He is alone now. He stands fingering the fishing-rods tenderly, then wanders back into the ingle-nook. In the room we could scarcely see him, for it has gone slowly dark there, a grey darkness, as if the lamp, though still burning, was becoming unable to shed light. Through the greyness we see him very well beyond it in the glow of the fire. He sits on the settle and tries to read his paper. He breaks down. He is a pitiful lonely man.

In the silence something happens. A well-remembered voice says,

DICK: 'Father.'

Mr. Don looks into the greyness from which this voice comes, and he sees his son. We see no one, but we are to understand that, to Mr. Don, Dick is standing there in his habit as he lived. He goes to his boy.

MR DON: 'Dick!'

DICK: 'I have come to sit with you for a bit, father.'

It is the gay, young, careless voice.

MR DON: 'It's you, Dick; it's you!'

DICK: 'It's me all right, father. I say, don't be startled, or anything of that kind. We don't like that.'

MR DON: 'My boy!'

Evidently Dick is the taller, for Mr. Don has to look up to him. He puts his hands on the boy's shoulders.

DICK: 'How am I looking, father?'

MR DON: 'You haven't altered, Dick.'

DICK: 'Rather not. It's jolly to see the old studio again!' *In a cajoling voice,* 'I say, father, don't fuss. Let us be our ordinary selves, won't you?'

MR DON: 'I'll try, I'll try. You didn't say you had come to sit with me, Dick? Not with me!'

DICK: 'Rather!'

MR DON: 'But your mother — —'

DICK: 'It's you I want.'

MR DON: 'Me?'

DICK: 'We can only come to one, you see.'

MR DON: 'Then why me?'

DICK: 'That's the reason.' *He is evidently moving about, looking curiously at old acquaintances.* 'Hello, here's your old jacket, greasier than ever!'

MR DON: 'Me? But, Dick, it is as if you had forgotten. It was your mother who was everything to you. It can't be you if you have forgotten that. I used to feel so out of it; but, of course, you didn't know.'

DICK: 'I didn't know it till lately, father; but heaps of things that I didn't know once are clear to me now. I didn't know that you were the one who would miss me most; but I know now.'

Though the voice is as boyish as ever, there is a new note in it of which his father is

aware. Dick may not have grown much wiser, but whatever he does know now he seems to know for certain.

MR DON: 'Me miss you most? Dick, I try to paint just as before. I go to the club. Dick, I have been to a dinner-party. I said I wouldn't give in.'

DICK: 'We like that.'

MR DON: 'But, my boy — —'

Mr. Don's arms have gone out to him again. Dick evidently wriggles away from them. He speaks coaxingly.

DICK: 'I say, father, let's get away from that sort of thing.'

MR DON: 'That is so like you, Dick! I'll do anything you ask.'

DICK: 'Then keep a bright face.'

MR DON: 'I've tried to.'

DICK: 'Good man! I say, put on your old greasy; you are looking so beastly clean.'

The old greasy is the jacket, and Mr. Don obediently gets into it.

MR DON: 'Anything you like. No, that's the wrong sleeve. Thanks, Dick.'

They are in the ingle-nook now, and the mischievous boy catches his father by the shoulders.

DICK: 'Here, let me shove you into your old seat.'

Mr. Don is propelled on to the settle.

DICK: 'How's that, umpire!'

MR DON: 'Dick,' *smiling*, 'that's just how you used to butt me into it long ago!'

Dick is probably standing with his back to the fire, chuckling.

DICK: 'When I was a kid.'

MR DON: 'With the palette in my hand.'

DICK; 'Or sticking to your trousers.'

MR DON; 'The mess we made of ourselves, Dick.'

DICK; 'I sneaked behind the settle and climbed up it.'

MR DON: 'Till you fell off.'

DICK: 'On top of you and the palette.'

It is good fun for a father and son; and the crafty boy has succeeded in making the father laugh. But soon,

MR DON: 'Ah, Dick.'

The son frowns. He is not going to stand any nonsense.

DICK: 'Now then, behave! What did I say about that face?'

Mr. Don smiles at once, obediently.

DICK: 'That's better. I'll sit here.'

We see from his father's face which is smiling with difficulty that Dick has plopped into the big chair on the other side of the ingle-nook. His legs are probably dangling over one of its arms.

DICK: *Rather sharply*, 'Got your pipe?'

MR DON: 'I don't — I don't seem to care to smoke nowadays, Dick.'

DICK: 'Rot! Just because I am dead! You that pretend to be plucky! I won't have it, you know. You get your pipe, and look slippy about it.'

MR DON: 'Yes, Dick,' *the old man says obediently. He fills his pipe from a jar on the mantelshelf. We may be sure that Dick is watching closely to see that he lights it properly.*

DICK; 'Now, then, burn your thumb with the match — you always did, you know. That's the style. You've forgotten to cock your head to the side. Not so bad. That's you. Like it?'

MR DON: 'It's rather nice, Dick. Dick, you and me by the fire!'

DICK: 'Yes, but sit still. How often we might have been like this, father, and weren't.'

MR DON: 'Ah!'

DICK: 'Face. How is Fido?'

MR DON: 'Never a dog missed her master more.'

DICK: 'Oh,' *frowning*. 'She doesn't want to go and sit on my grave, or any of that tosh, does she? As if I were there!'

MR DON: 'No, no,' *hastily*; 'she goes rattling, Dick.'

DICK: 'Good old Fido!'

MR DON: 'Dick, here's a good one. We oughtn't to keep a dog at all because we are on rations now; but what do you think Fido ate yesterday?'

DICK: 'Let me guess. The joint?'

MR DON: 'Almost worse than that. She ate all the cook's meat tickets.'

They laugh, together, but when Dick says light-heartedly,

DICK: 'That dog will be the death of me.' *his father shivers. Dick does not notice this; his eyes have drawn him to the fishing-rods.*

DICK: 'Hullo!'

MR DON: 'Yes, those are your old fishing-rods.'

DICK: 'Here's the little hickory! Do you remember, father, how I got the seven-pounder on a burn-trout cast? No, you weren't there. That was a day. It was really only six and three-quarters. I put a stone in its mouth the second time we weighed it!'

MR DON: 'You loved fishing, Dick.'

DICK: 'Didn't I? Why weren't you oftener with me? I'll tell you a funny thing, When I went a soldiering I used to pray — just standing up, you know — that I shouldn't lose my right arm, because it would be so awkward for casting.' He cogitates as he

returns to the ingle-nook. 'Somehow I never thought I should be killed. Lots of fellows thought that about themselves, but I never did. It was quite a surprise to me.'

MR DON: 'Oh, Dick!'

DICK: 'What's the matter? Oh, I forgot. Face!' He is apparently looking down at his father wonderingly. 'Haven't you got over it yet, father? I got over it so long ago. I wish you people would understand what a little thing it is.'

MR DON: 'Tell me,' *very humbly*; 'tell me, Dick.'

DICK: 'All right.' *He is in the chair again.* 'Mind, I can't tell you where I was killed; it's against the regulations.'

MR DON: 'I know where.'

DICK: *Curiously*, 'You got a wire, I suppose?'

MR DON: 'Yes.'

DICK: 'There's always a wire for officers, even for 2nd Lieutenants. It's jolly decent of them.'

MR DON: 'Tell me, Dick, about the — the veil. I mean the veil that is drawn between the living and the — .'

DICK: 'The dead? Funny how you jib at that word.'

MR DON: 'I suppose the veil is like a mist?'

DICK: 'The veil's a rummy thing, father. Yes, like a mist. But when one has been at the Front for a bit, you can't think how thin the veil seems to get; just one layer of it. I suppose it seems thin to you out there because one step takes you through it. We sometimes mix up those who have gone through with those who haven't. I daresay if I were to go back to my old battalion the living chaps would just nod to me.'

MR DON: 'Dick!'

DICK: 'Where's that pipe? Death? Well, to me, before my day came, it was like some part of the line I had heard a lot about but never been in. I mean, never been in to stay, because, of course, one often popped in and out.'

MR DON: 'Dick, the day that you — —'

DICK: 'My day? I don't remember being hit, you know. I don't remember anything till the quietness came. When you have been killed it suddenly becomes very quiet; quieter even than you have ever known it at home. Sunday used to be a pretty quiet day at my tutor's, when Trotter and I flattened out on the first shady spot up the river; but it is quieter than that. I am not boring you, am I?'

MR DON: 'My boy!'

DICK: 'When I came to, the veil was so thin that I couldn't see it at all; and my first thought was, Which side of it have I come out on? The living ones lying on the ground were asking that about themselves, too. There we were, all sitting up and asking whether we were alive or dead; and some were one, and some were the other. Sort of fluke, you know.'

MR DON: 'I — I — oh, Dick!'

DICK: 'As soon as each had found out about himself he wondered how it had gone with his chums, I halloo'd to Johnny Randall, and he halloo'd back that he was dead, but that Trotter was living. That's the way of it. A good deal of chaff, of course. By that time the veil was there, and getting thicker, and we lined up on our right sides. Then I could only see the living ones in shadow and hear their voices from a distance. They sang out to us for a while; but just at first, father, it was rather lonely when we couldn't hear their tread any longer. What are you fidgeting about? You needn't worry; that didn't last long; we were heaps more interested in ourselves than in them. You should have heard the gabbling! It was all so frightfully novel, you see; and no one quite knew what to do next, whether all to start off together, or wait for some one to come for us. I say, what a lot I'm talking!'

MR DON: 'What happened, Dick?'

DICK: 'Oh!' a proud ring coming into the voice, 'Ockley came for us. He used to be alive, you know — the Ockley who was keeper of the fives in my first half. I once pointed him out to mother. I was jolly glad he was the one who came for us. As soon as I saw it was Ockley I knew we should be all right.'

MR DON: 'Dick, I like that Ockley.'

DICK: 'Rather. I wish I could remember something funny to tell you though. There are lots of jokes, but I am such a one for forgetting them.'

He laughs boisterously. We may be sure that he flings back his head. You remember how Dick used to fling back his head when he laughed? — No, you didn't know him.

DICK: 'Father, do you remember little Wantage who was at my private and came on to Ridley's house in my third half? His mother was the one you called Emily.'

MR DON: 'Emily Wantage's boy.'

DICK: 'That's the card. We used to call him Jemima, because he and his mother were both caught crying when lock-up struck, and she had to clear out.'

MR DON: 'She was very fond of him, Dick.'

DICK: 'Oh, I expect no end. Tell her he's killed.'

MR DON: 'She knows.'

DICK: 'She had got a wire. That isn't the joke, though. You see he got into a hopeless muddle about which side of the veil he had come out on; and he went off with the other ones, and they wouldn't have him, and he got lost in the veil, running up and down it, calling to us; and just for the lark we didn't answer.' *He chuckles*, 'I expect he has become a ghost!' *With sudden consideration*, 'Best not tell his mother that.'

Mr. Don rises, wincing, and Dick also is at once on his feet, full of compunction.

DICK: 'Was that shabby of me? Sorry, father. We are all pretty young, you know, and we can't help having our fun still.'

MR DON: 'I'm glad you still have your fun,' *the father says, once more putting his hands on Dick's shoulders*. 'Let me look at you again, Dick. There is such a serenity about you now.'

DICK: 'Serenity, that's the word! None of us could remember what the word was. It's a ripping good thing to have. I should be awfully bucked if you would have it, too.'

MR DON: 'I'll try.'

DICK: 'I say, how my tongue runs on! But, after all, it was my show. Now, you tell me some things.'

MR DON: 'What about, Dick? The war?'

DICK: 'No,' *almost in a shout*. 'We have a fine for speaking about the war. And you know, those fellows we were fighting — I forget who they were?'

MR DON: 'The Germans.'

DICK: 'Oh yes. Some of them were on the same side of the veil with us, and they were rather decent; so we chummed up in the end and Ockley took us all away together. They were jolly lucky in getting Ockley. There I go again! Come on, it's your turn. Has the bathroom tap been mended yet?'

MR DON: 'I'm afraid it is — just tied up with that string still, Dick. It works all right.'

DICK: 'It only needs two screw-nails, you know.'

MR DON: 'I'll see to it.'

DICK: 'Do you know whether any one at my tutors got his fives choice this half?'

MR DON: 'I'm sorry, Dick, but — —'

DICK: 'Or who is the captain of the boats?'

MR DON: 'No, I — —'

DICK: 'Whatever have you been doing?' *He is moving about the room*. 'Hullo, here's mother's work-box! Is mother all right?'

MR DON: 'Very sad about you, Dick.'

DICK: 'Oh, I say, that isn't fair. Why doesn't she cheer up?'

MR DON: 'It isn't so easy, my boy.'

DICK: 'It's pretty hard lines on me, you know.'

MR DON: 'How is that?'

DICK: 'If you are sad, I have to be sad. That's how we have got to work it off. You can't think how we want to be bright.'

MR DON: 'I'll always remember that, and I'll tell your mother. Ah, but she won't

believe me, Dick; you will have to tell her yourself.'

DICK: 'I can't do that, father. I can only come to one.'

MR DON: 'She should have been the one; she loved you best, Dick.'

DICK: 'Oh, I don't know. Do you ever,' *with a slight hesitation*, 'see Laura now?'

MR DON: 'She is staying with us at present.'

DICK: 'Is she? I think I should like to see her.'

MR DON: 'If Laura were to see you — —'

DICK: 'Oh, she wouldn't see me. She is not dressed in black, is she?'

MR DON: 'No, in white.'

DICK: 'Good girl! I suppose mother is in black?'

MR DON: 'Surely, Dick.'

DICK: 'It's too bad, you know.'

MR DON: 'You weren't exactly — engaged to Laura, were you, Dick?' *A bold question from a father, but the circumstances were unusual. Apologetically*, 'I never rightly knew.'

DICK: 'No!' *Dick has flung back his head again. Confidentially*, 'Father, I sometimes thought of it, but it rather scared me! I expect that is about how it was with her, too.'

MR DON: 'She is very broken about you now.'

DICK: *Irritated*, 'Oh, hang!'

MR DON: 'Would you like her to forget you, Dick?'

DICK: 'Rather not. But she might help a fellow a bit. Hullo!'

What calls forth this exclamation, is the little table at which the seance had taken place. The four chairs are still standing round it, as if they were guarding something.

DICK: 'Here's something new, father; this table.'

MR DON: 'Yes, It is usually in the drawing-room.'

DICK: 'Of course. I remember.'

MR DON: *sets his teeth*. 'Does that table suggest anything to you, Dick?'

DICK: 'To me? Let me think. Yes, I used to play backgammon on it. What is it doing here?'

MR DON: 'Your mother brought it in.'

DICK: 'To play games on? Mother!'

MR DON: 'I don't — know that it was a game, Dick.'

DICK: 'But to play anything! I'm precious glad she can do that. Was Laura playing with her?'

MR DON: 'She was helping her.'

DICK: 'Good for Laura.' He is looking at some slips of paper on the table. 'Are those pieces of paper used in the game? There is writing on them: "The first letter is H — the second letter is A — the third letter is R." What does it mean?'

MR DON: 'Does it convey no meaning to you, Dick?'

DICK: 'To me? No; why should it?'

MR DON: *is enjoying no triumph*. 'Let us go back to the fire, my boy.'

Dick follows him into the ingle-nook.

DICK: 'But, why should it convey a meaning to me? I was never much of a hand at indoor games.' Brightly, 'I bet you Ockley would be good at it.' After a joyous ramble, 'Ockley's nickname still sticks to him!'

MR DON: 'I don't think I know it.'

DICK: 'He was a frightful swell, you know. Keeper of the field, and played against Harrow the same year. I suppose it did go just a little to his head.'

They are back in their old seats, and Mr. Don leans forward in gleeful anticipation. Probably Dick is leaning forward in the same way, and this old father is merely copying him.

MR DON: 'What did you nickname him, Dick?'

DICK: 'It was his fags that did it!'

MR DON: 'I should like to know it. I say, do tell me, Dick.'

DICK: 'He is pretty touchy about it now, you know.'

MR DON: 'I won't tell any one. Come on, Dick.'

DICK: 'His fags called him K.C.M.G.'

MR DON: 'Meaning, meaning, Dick?'

DICK: 'Meaning "Kindly Call Me God!"'

Mr. Don flings back his head; so we know what Dick is doing. They are a hilarious pair, perhaps too noisy, for suddenly Mr. Don looks at the door.

MR DON: 'I think I heard some one, Dick!'

DICK: 'Perhaps it's mother!'

MR DON: 'She may,' *nervously*, 'have heard the row.'

DICK: *his eyes must be twinkling*. 'I say, father, you'll catch it!'

MR DON: 'I can't believe, Dick,' *gazing wistfully into the chair*, 'that she won't see you.'

It is a sadder voice than his own for the moment that answers,

DICK: 'Only one may see me.'

MR DON: 'You will speak to her, Dick. Let her hear your voice.'

DICK: 'Only one may hear me. I could make her the one; but it would mean your losing me.'

MR DON: 'I can't give you up, Dick.'

Mrs. Don comes in, as beautiful as ever, but a little aggrieved.

MRS DON: 'I called to you, Robert.'

MR DON: 'Yes, I thought — I was just going to — —'

He has come from the ingle-nook to meet her. He looks from her to Dick, whom he sees so clearly, standing now by the fire. An awe falls upon Mr. Don. He says her name,

MR DON: Grace...

meaning, 'See, Grace, who is with us.'
Her eyes follow his, but she sees nothing, not even two arms outstretched to her.

MRS DON: 'What is it, Robert? What is the matter?'

She does not hear a voice say,

DICK: *'Mother!'*

MRS DON: 'I heard you laughing, Robert; what on earth at?'

The father cannot speak.

DICK: 'Now you're in a hole, father!' *says a mischievous, voice.*

MRS DON: 'Can I not be told, Robert?'

DICK: 'Something in the paper,' the voice whispers.

Mr. Don lifts the paper feebly, and his wife understands.

MRS DON: 'Oh, a newspaper joke! Please, I don't want to hear it.'

MR DON: 'Was it my laughing that brought you back, Grace?'

MRS DON: 'No, that would only have made me shut my door. If Dick thought you could laugh!' *She goes to the little table. 'I came back for these slips of paper.'* *She lifts them and presses them to her breast. 'These precious slips of paper!'*

Dick was always a curious boy, and forgetting that she cannot hear him, he blurts out,

DICK: 'How do you mean, mother? Why are they precious?'

Mr. Don forgets also and looks to her for an answer.

MRS DON: 'What is it, Robert?'

MR DON: 'Didn't you — hear anything, Grace?'

MRS DON: 'No. Perhaps Laura was calling; I left her on the stair.'

MR DON: 'I wish,' *Mr. Don is fighting for Dick now*, 'I wish Laura would come back and say good-night to me.'

MRS DON; 'I daresay she will.'

MR DON: 'And,' valiantly, 'if she could be — rather brighter, Grace.'

MRS DON: 'Robert!'

MR DON: 'I think Dick would like it.'

Her fine eyes reproach him mutely, but she says, ever forgiving,

MRS DON; 'Is that how you look at it, Robert? Very well, laugh your fill — if you can. But if Dick were to appear before me to-night — —'

MR DICK: *In his distress Mr. Don cries aloud to the figure by the fire*, 'Dick, if you can appear to your mother, do it.'

There is a pause in which anything may happen, but nothing happens. Yes, something happened: Dick has stuck to his father.

MRS DON: 'Really, Robert!' *says, and, without a word of reproach, she goes away. Evidently Dick comes to his father, who has sank into a chair, and puts a loving hand on him. Mr. Don clasps it without looking up.*

DICK: 'Father, that was top-hole of you! Poor mother, I should have liked to hug her; but I can't.'

MR DON: 'You should have gone to her, Dick; you shouldn't have minded me.'

DICK: *The wiser boy says, 'Mother's a darling, but she doesn't need me as much as you do.'*

MR DON; 'I don't know.'

DICK: 'That's all right. I'm glad she's so keen about that game, though.'

He has returned to the ingle-nook when Laura comes in, eager to make amends to Dick's father if she hurt him when she went out.

LAURA: *Softly, 'I have come to say good-night, Mr. Don.'*

MR DON; 'It's nice of you, Laura,' *taking both her hands.*

DICK: 'I want her to come nearer to the fire; I can't see her very well there.'

For a moment Mr. Don is caught out again; but Laura has heard nothing. He becomes quite cunning in Dick's interests.

MR DON: 'Your hands are cold, Laura; go over to the fire. I want to look at you.'

She sits on the hearthstone by Dick's feet.

LAURA: Shyly, 'Am I all right?'

It is Dick who answers.

DICK: 'You're awfully pretty, Laura. You are even prettier than I thought. I remember I used to think, she can't be quite as pretty as I think her; and then when you came you were just a little prettier.'

She has been warming her hands.

LAURA: 'Why don't you say anything?' *she asks Mr. Don.*

MR DON: 'I was thinking of you and Dick, Laura.'

DICK: 'What a pretty soul she has, father,' *says the boy; 'I can see right down into it now.'*

MR DON: 'If Dick had lived, Laura, do you think that you and he — ?'

LAURA: With shining eyes, 'I think — if he had wanted it very much.'

MR DON: 'I expect he would, my dear.'

There is an odd candour about Dick's contribution.

DICK: 'I think so, too, but I never was quite sure.'

LAURA: *trembling a little.* 'Mr. Don—'

MR DON: 'Yes, Laura?'

LAURA: 'I think there is something wicked about me. I sometimes feel quite light-hearted — though Dick has gone.'

MR DON: 'Perhaps, nowadays, the fruit trees have that sort of shame when they blossom, Laura; but they can't help doing it. I hope you are yet to be a happy woman, a happy wife.'

LAURA: 'It seems so heartless to Dick.'

DICK: 'Not a bit; it's what I should like,'

MR DON: 'It's what he would like, Laura.'

DICK: 'Do you remember, Laura,' *Dick goes on,* 'I kissed you once. It was under a lilac in the Loudon Woods. I knew at the time that you were angry, and I should have apologised. I'm sorry, Laura.'

His sweetheart has risen, tasting something bitter-sweet.

MR DON: 'What is it, Laura?' Mr. Don asks.

LAURA: 'Somehow — I don't know how — but, for a moment I seemed to feel the smell of lilac. Dick was once — nice to me under a lilac. Oh, Mr. Don—' *She goes to him like a child, and he soothes and pets her.*

MR DON: 'There, there! That will be all right, quite all right.' *He takes her to the door.* 'Good-night, my dear.'

LAURA: 'Good-night, Mr. Don.'

DICK: 'Good-bye, Laura,'

Mr. Don is looking so glum that the moment they are alone Dick has to cry warningly,

DICK: 'Face!'

He is probably looking glum himself, for he says candidly,

DICK: 'Pretty awful things, these partings. Father, don't feel hurt though I dodge the good-bye business when I leave you.'

MR DON: 'That's so like you, Dick!'

DICK: 'I'll have to go soon.'

MR DON: 'Oh, Dick! Can't you—'

DICK: 'There's something I want not to miss, you see.'

MR DON: 'I'm glad of that.'

DICK: 'I'm not going yet; but I mean that when I do I'll just slip away.'

MR DON: 'What I am afraid of is that you won't come back.'

DICK: 'I will — honest Injun — if you keep bright.'

MR DON: 'But, if I do that, Dick, you might think I wasn't missing you so much.'

DICK: 'We know better than that. You see, if you're bright, I'll get a good mark for it.'

MR DON: 'I'll be bright.'

Dick pops him into the settle again.

DICK: 'Remember your pipe.'

MR DON: 'Yes, Dick.'

DICK: 'Do you still go to that swimming-bath, and do your dumb-bell exercises?'

MR DON: 'No, I—'

DICK: 'You must.'

MR DON: 'All right, Dick, I will.'

DICK: 'And I want you to be smarter next time. Your hair's awful.'

MR DON: 'I'll get it cut, Dick.'

DICK: 'Are you hard at work over your picture of those three Graces?'

MR DON: 'No. I put that away. I'm just doing little things nowadays. I can't—'

DICK: 'Look here, sonny, you've got to go on with it. You don't seem to know how interested I am in your future.'

MR DON: 'Very well, Dick; I'll bring it out again.' *Mr. Don hesitates.* 'Dick, there is something I have wanted to ask you all the time.'

DICK: *Some fear seems to come into the boy's voice.* 'Don't ask it, father.'

MR DON: 'I shall go on worrying about it if I don't — but just as you like, Dick.'

DICK: 'Go ahead, father; ask me.'

MR DON: 'It is this. Would you rather be — here — than there?'

DICK: *After a pause the boy says,* 'Not always.'

MR DON: 'What is the great difference, Dick?'

DICK: 'Well, down here one knows he has risks to run.'

MR DON: 'And you miss that?'

DICK: 'It must be rather jolly.'

MR DON: 'Did you know that was what I was to ask?'

DICK: 'Yes. But, remember, I'm young at it.'

MR DON: 'And your gaiety, Dick; is it all real, or only put on to help me?'

DICK: 'It's — it's half and half, father.' *Face! he cries, next moment. Then cajolingly,* 'Father, K.C.M.G.!'

MR DON: 'When will you come again, Dick?'

DICK: 'There's no saying. One can't always get through. They keep changing the password.' *His voice grows troubled.* 'It's awfully difficult to get the password.'

MR DON: 'What was it to-night?'

DICK: 'Love Bade Me Welcome.'

Mr. Don rises; he stares at his son.

MR DON: 'How did you get it, Dick?'

DICK: 'I'm not sure.' *Dick seems to go closer to his father, as if for protection.* 'There are lots of things I don't understand yet.'

MR DON: 'There are things I don't understand either. Dick, did you ever try to send messages — from there — to us?'

DICK: 'Me? No.'

MR DON: 'Or get messages from us?'

DICK: 'No. How could we?'

MR DON: 'Is there anything in it?'

Mr. Don is not speaking to his son. He goes to the little table and looks long at it. Has it taken on a sinister aspect? Those chairs, are they guarding a secret?

MR DON: 'Dick, this table — your mother — how could they — —'

He turns, to find that Dick has gone.

MR DON: 'Dick! My boy! Dick!'

The well-remembered voice leaves a message behind it.

DICK: 'Be bright, father.'

Mr. Don sits down by the fire to think it all out.

BARBARA'S WEDDING

COMMENTARY

This final play is the most unusual of the 'Echoes' Plays. It juxtaposes realism with fantasy in a way that can be quite confusing to the unwary. And that is quite deliberate. The play considers the effect of war on memory. Often what is real and what is a figment of the imagination is hard to discern. One might also suggest that it is quite bleak in outlook.

'The plays action is concerned with a remembrance of the peace before the war and a vision of the future after the war, both intertwined with the present of the war.'

Written in 1918 it was published in the August 1918 edition of *Reveille*, a short-lived but highly successful journal, for and about disabled soldiers, begun by the Ministry of Pensions. Its editor John Galsworthy was concerned that the victims of the war should not be forgotten once the war was over. He understood that once the fighting itself had ended, the British would be eager to forget the war and in that forgetting, the disabled soldiers would cease to exist in the minds of a people.

Barrie did extensive philanthropic work during the war years, especially in the funding of hospitals and it is not surprising that when Galsworthy, determined to "*awaken the nation to its obligations to the war wounded*," called on fellow writers such as Edith Wharton, Thomas Hardy, Rudyard Kipling, Siegfried Sassoon, and Robert Graves to contribute to his journal, that Barrie rose to the challenge.

Perhaps we might see this is less a play about the war and more about the consequences of war on the mind. *Barbara's Wedding* is more sweeping than the other 'Echoes' plays, taking itself out of domestic realism and concerning itself more with the realm of the mind and memory. Yet the Great War is woven into the fabric of the play in subtle ways.

Existing in the realms of remembrance and memory, it may be seen as a tragic indictment of the illusions that perpetuated the Great War. In this respect it perhaps has more in common with *Der Tag* than the other 'Echoes' Plays. It also has some points of contact with Barrie's popular play of 1917 *Dear Brutus* in whose shadow it perhaps resides – we might even speculate that there is some interplay between the 'dreams' of the Colonel and Lob. Reading *Dear Brutus* can help with an understanding of this play, and perhaps performing them both together would yield some interesting perspectives. But while it shares many of the same aims as *Dear Brutus*, *Barbara's Wedding* is somehow a more 'private' play. It is important that the audience understand this, however you choose to stage it. The ramblings are intended to be somewhat discomfiting, but they should not stretch the patience of the viewer.

Barbara's Wedding was not performed until a decade after its publication and has remained a 'problem' play since. The stage premier was on 23 August 1927 at

the Savoy Theatre as a curtain-raiser to Strindberg's *The Father*.

Set in a large house, it is also a play about the aristocracy rather than the working or middle classes of the other plays. From the vantage point of 1917, John, called the Colonel because he had served as a Colonel in the Crimean War, looks both to the past and to the future. Here Barrie gives us the landed gentry's view on war.

It is important for the audience/reader to understand that many of the characters only exist in the mind of the Colonel. In this respect, like *A Well Remembered Voice*, it's a play well suited to theatre and to 'moving' performance, perhaps more so than simple reading.

Treatment of time in the play is complex (as it is in memory) and it is a complex task to juxtapose three time frames - and to expose the fantasy within the 'realism' of the actions of *The Colonel*. But if the play is taken too literally it will fail. That said, it's a very interesting insight into memory (and possibly dementia) and as such, well worth persevering with. *Barbara's Wedding* offers a different perspective on the individual experience (and memory) of war. Performed properly it is very moving and poignant. But there is less of Barrie's trademark humour here.

The Colonel is a man 'out of his time.' Like Mr Torrance in *The New Word* he has to realise that this war is not 'his.' His fleeting understanding provides much of the pathos of the play. It is not surprising that, as it was written very late in the war, the play is significant for its awareness of all that has changed, including but not exclusively the breaking down of class barriers. Post war men like the Colonel (failing memories or not) find a world quite different to that they inhabited in 1914.

The Great War changed society for ever and those at the top end in many ways bore the highest price as 'equality' came to the fore. Yet Barrie shows that for all the nostalgia towards the past, there is a new reality. It is, perhaps, too great a reality for *The Colonel* to understand. His fractured mind represents the breaking of society from the pre-war reality and an inability to adjust to a new reality. Those around him try to protect him, but the only protection is in fantasy.

As such this is quite a bleak play and one might expect that after a long period of war it was hard to imagine much good coming out of it. Barrie certainly does not suggest a bright new world here. However good the future might be, we sense that for the Colonel, for Barrie and many others, the loss of life was an almost impossible price to pay. Words were broken in other 'echoes' plays. Here the mind itself is fractured.

Responses to the play in the twenties were quite poor, especially in comparison to Barrie's other plays. Critics tended to miss the deeper significance, some dismissing it as sentimental and dated. With hindsight we might see it as more experimental. It must be accepted that it is at the very least a 'difficult' play that requires a director and cast with insight and commitment to the themes to 'pull it off.' But sometimes the most difficult things are the things we most need to see/hear. Today we might see this as Barrie's own elegy to the War. As such it has a justified place within the pantheon of war plays. It also has a significance on a

psychological level, as a play to do with the fragility and complexity of mind and memory. For anyone brave enough to engage with staging it, this is a remarkable work among many created by J.M.Barrie.

As an exploration of how the individual psyche deals with trauma it is both challenging and insightful. Illusion and reality are central to the play, the changed positions of 'real' to 'unreal' throughout support this exploration. Through it, Barrie is certainly exploring the complexity of that which we call 'reality.'

Barrie scholar Kubly notes: '*Barrie recognized that his final vision of the war was tragic both in its condemnation of the illusions that had created a culture capable of the Great War and its acknowledgment of a post-war culture that was unable to come to terms with its own disenchantment.*'

While contemporary (and some subsequent) commentators may have found the play lacking, distasteful or inappropriate, in 1990 N. P. Scharma suggested that the play accurately portrays the depth of human emotions and the inability of man (represented by the Colonel) to fully deal with the horrors of war, and therefore retreats to the pleasant past. He says: "*Barrie's handling of a 'flash,' with so much compression and intensity not only shows his spiritual concern with the sufferings of the war, but also his keenness to present that inner feeling on the stage.*"

As such *Barbara's Wedding* is as powerful an 'echo' as any of the others in this collection.

BARBARA'S WEDDING

CAST

The Colonel (very old)
Dering (young)
Karl (young)
Billy (young)
Barbara (?)
Ellen (old)

The Colonel is in the sitting-room of his country cottage, staring through the open windows at his pretty garden. He is a very old man, and is sometimes bewildered nowadays. He calls to Dering, the gardener, who is on a ladder, pruning. Dering, who comes to him, is a rough, capable young fellow with fingers that are already becoming stumpy because he so often uses his hands instead of a spade. This is a sign that Dering will never get on in the world. His mind is in the same condition as his fingers, working back to clods. He will get a rise of one and sixpence in a year or two, and marry on it and become duller and heavier; and, in short, the clever ones could already write his epitaph.

COLONEL: 'A beautiful morning, Dering.'

DERING: 'Too much sun, sir. The roses be complaining, and, to make matters worse, Miss Barbara has been watering of them — in the heat of the day.'

The Colonel is a very gentle knight nowadays.

COLONEL: 'Has she? She means well.' *But that is not what is troubling him. He approaches the subject diffidently.* 'Dering, you heard it, didn't you?' He is longing to be told that Dering heard it.

DERING: 'What was that, sir?'

COLONEL: 'The thunderstorm — early this morning.'

DERING: 'There was no thunderstorm, sir.'

COLONEL: *Dispirited*, 'That is what they all say.'

The Colonel is too courteous to contradict any one, but he tries again; there is about

him the insistence of one who knows that he is right. 'It was at four o'clock. I got up and looked out at the window. The evening primroses were very beautiful.'

Dering is equally dogged.

DERING: 'I don't hold much with evening primroses, sir; but I was out and about at four; there was no thunderstorm.'

The Colonel still thinks that there was a thunderstorm, but he wants to placate Dering.

COLONEL: 'I suppose I just thought there was one. Perhaps it was some thunderstorm of long ago that I heard. They do come back, you know.'

DERING: Heavily, 'Do they, sir?'

COLONEL: 'I am glad to see you moving about in the garden, Dering, with everything just as usual.'

There is a cautious slyness about this, as if the Colonel was fishing for information; but it is too clever for Dering, who is going with a

DERING: 'Thank you, sir.'

COLONEL: 'No, don't go.' *The old man lowers his voice and makes a confession reluctantly,* 'I am — a little troubled, Dering.'

Dering knows that his master has a wandering mind, and he answers nicely,

DERING: 'Everything be all right, sir.'

COLONEL: 'I'm glad of that,' *the Colonel says with relief.* 'It is pleasant to see that you have come back, Dering. Why did you go away for such a long time?'

DERING: 'Me, sir?' *Dering is a little aggrieved.* 'I haven't had a day off since Christmas.'

COLONEL: 'Haven't you? I thought—' *The Colonel tries to speak casually, but there is a trembling eagerness in his voice.* 'Is everything just as usual, Dering?'

DERING: 'Yes, sir. There never were a place less changed than this.'

COLONEL: 'That's true.' *The Colonel is appeased.* 'Thank you, Dering, for saying

that.' *But next moment he has lowered his voice again.* 'Dering, there is nothing wrong, is there? Is anything happening that I am not being told about?'

DERING: 'Not that I know of, sir.'

COLONEL: 'That is what they all say, but — I don't know.' *He stares at his old sword which is hanging on the wall.* 'Dering, I feel as if I was needed somewhere. I don't know where it is. No one will tell me. Where is every one?'

DERING: 'They're all about, sir. There's a cricket match on at the village green.'

COLONEL: 'Is there?'

DERING: 'If the wind had a bit of south in it you could hear their voices. You were a bit of a nailer at cricket yourself, sir.'

The Colonel sees himself standing up to fast ones. He is gleeful over his reminiscences.

COLONEL: 'Ninety-nine against Mallowfield, and then bowled off my pads. Biggest score I ever made. Mallowfield wanted to add one to make it the hundred, but I wouldn't let them. I was pretty good at steering them through the slips, Dering! Do you remember my late cut? It didn't matter where point stood, I got past him. You used to stand at point, Dering.'

DERING: 'That was my grandfather, sir. If he was to be believed, he used to snap you regular at point.'

The Colonel is crestfallen, but he has a disarming smile.

COLONEL: 'Did he? I daresay he did. I can't play now, but I like to watch it still.' *He becomes troubled again.* 'Dering, there is no cricket on the green today. I have been down to look. I don't understand it, Dering. When I got there the green was all dotted with them — it's the prettiest sight and sound in England. But as I watched them they began to go away, one and two at a time; they weren't given out, you know, they went as if they had been called away. Some of the little shavers stayed on — and then they went off, as if they had been called away too. The stumps were left lying about. Why is it?'

DERING: 'It's just fancy, sir,' Dering says soothingly, 'I saw Master Will oiling his bat yesterday.'

COLONEL: 'Did you?' *avidly.* 'I should have liked to see that. I have often oiled

their bats for them. Careless lads, they always forget. Was that nice German boy with him?’

DERING: ‘Mr. Karl? Not far off, sir. He was sitting by the bank of the stream playing on his flute; and Miss Barbara, she had climbed one of my apple-trees, — she says they are your trees.’ *He lowers.*

COLONEL: *meekly*, ‘They are, you know, Dering’.

DERING: ‘Yes, sir, in a sense,’ *brushing the spurious argument aside*, ‘but I don’t like any of you to meddle with them. And there she sat, pelting the two of them with green apples.’

COLONEL: ‘How like her!’ *The Colonel shakes his head indulgently.* ‘I don’t know how we are to make a demure young lady of her.’

DERING: *smirks.* ‘They say in the village, sir, that Master Will would like to try.’

To the Colonel this is wit of a high order.

COLONEL: ‘Ha! ha! he is just a colt himself.’ *But the laughter breaks off. He seems to think that he will get the truth if Dering comes closer,* ‘Who are all here now, Dering; in the house, I mean? I sometimes forget. They grow old so quickly. They go out at one door in the bloom of youth, and come back by another, tired and grey. Haven’t you noticed it?’

DERING: ‘No, sir. The only visitors staying here are Miss Barbara and Mr. Karl. There’s just them and yourselves, sir, you and the mistress and Master Will. That’s all.’

COLONEL: ‘Yes, that’s all,’ *his master says, still unconvinced.* ‘Who is the soldier, Dering?’

DERING: ‘Soldier, sir? There is no soldier here except yourself.’

COLONEL: ‘Isn’t there? There was a nurse with him. Who is ill?’

DERING: ‘No one, sir. There’s no nurse.’ *Dering backs away from the old man.* ‘Would you like me to call the mistress, sir?’

COLONEL: ‘No, she has gone down to the village. She told me why, but I forget. Miss Barbara is with her.’

DERING: 'Miss Barbara is down by the stream, sir.'

COLONEL: 'Is she? I think they said they were going to a wedding.' *With an old man's curiosity*, 'Who is being married today, Dering?'

DERING: 'I have heard of no wedding, sir. But here is Miss Barbara.'

It is perhaps the first time that Dering has been glad to see Miss Barbara, who romps in, a merry hoyden, running over with animal spirits.

COLONEL: gaily, 'Here's the tomboy!'

Barbara looks suspiciously from one to the other.

BARBARA: 'Dering, I believe you are complaining to the Colonel about my watering the flowers at the wrong time of day.'

COLONEL: 'Aha! Aha!'

The Colonel thinks she is even wittier than Dering, who is properly abashed.

'DERING: I did just mention it, miss.'

BARBARA: 'You horrid!' *Barbara shakes her mop of hair at the gardener.* 'Dear, don't mind him. And every time he says they are his flowers and his apples, you tell me, and I shall say to his face that they are yours.'

COLONEL: *happy*, 'The courage of those young things!'

Dering's underlip becomes very pronounced, but he goes off into the garden. Barbara attempts to attend to the Colonel's needs.

BARBARA: 'Let me make you comfy — the way granny does it.'

She arranges his cushions clumsily.

COLONEL: *softly* 'That is not quite the way she does it. Do you call her granny, Barbara?'

BARBARA: 'She asked me to — for practice.' *Barbara is curious.* 'Don't you remember why?'

Of course the Colonel remembers.

COLONEL: 'I know! Billy boy.'

BARBARA: 'You are quick today. Now, wait till I get your cane.'

COLONEL: 'I don't need my cane while I'm sitting.'

BARBARA: 'You look so beau'ful, sitting holding your cane.' *She knocks over his cushions.* 'Oh dear! I am a clumsy.'

COLONEL: *Politely,* 'Not at all, but perhaps if I were to do it for myself.' *He makes himself comfortable.* 'That's better. Thank you, Barbara, very much.'

BARBARA: 'I didn't do it. I'm all thumbs. What a ghastly nurse I should make.'

COLONEL: 'Nurse?' *The Colonel's troubles return to him.* 'Who is she, Barbara?'

BARBARA: 'Who is who, dear?'

COLONEL: 'That nurse.'

BARBARA: 'There's no nurse here.'

COLONEL: 'Isn't there?'

BARBARA: *feels that she is of less use than ever today.* 'Where is granny?'

COLONEL: 'She has gone down to the village to a wedding.'

BARBARA: 'There's no wedding. Who could be being married?'

COLONEL: 'I think it's people I know, but I can't remember who they are. I thought you went too, Barbara.'

BARBARA: 'Not I. Catch me missing it if there had been a wedding!'

COLONEL: 'You and the nurse.'

BARBARA: 'Dear, you have just been imagining things again. Shall I play to you, or sing?' *She knocks over a chair,* 'Oh dear, everything catches in me. Would you like me to "Robin Adair," dear?'

The Colonel is polite, but firm.

COLONEL: 'No, thank you, Barbara.' *For a few moments he forgets her; his mind has gone wandering again.* 'Barbara, the house seems so empty. Where are Billy and Karl?'

BARBARA: 'Billy is where Karl is, you may be sure.'

COLONEL: 'And where is Karl?'

BARBARA: 'He is where Billy boy is, you may be sure.'

COLONEL: 'And where are they both?'

BARBARA: 'Not far from where Barbara is, you bet.' *She flutters to the window and waves her hand.* 'Do you hear Karl's flute? They have been down all the morning at the pool where the alder is, trying to catch that bull-trout.'

COLONEL: 'They didn't get him, I'll swear!'

BARBARA: 'You can ask them.'

COLONEL: 'I spent a lot of my youth trying to get that bull-trout. I tumbled in there sixty years ago.'

BARBARA: 'I tumbled in sixty minutes ago! It can't be the same trout, dear.'

COLONEL: 'Same old rascal!'

Billy and Karl come in by the window, leaving a fishing-rod outside. They are gay, careless, attractive youths.

BARBARA: *with her nose in the air*, 'You muddy things!'

COLONEL: *gaily firing his dart*, 'Did you get the bull-trout, Billy boy?'

BILLY. 'He's a brute that.'

COLONEL. 'He is, you know.'

BILLY. 'He came up several times and had a look at my fly. Didn't flick it, or do anything as complimentary as that. Just yawned and went down.'

COLONEL. 'Yawned, did he? Used to wink in my time. Did you and Billy fish at

Heidelberg, Karl?’

KARL. ‘We were more worthily employed, sir, but we did unbend at times. Billy, do you remember—’ He begins a gay dance.

BILLY. ‘Not I.’ Then he joins in.

BARBARA. ‘Young gentlemen, how disgraceful!’ She joins in.

COLONEL. ‘Harum-scarums!’

KARL. ‘Does he know about you two?’

BILLY. ‘He often forgets, I’ll tell him again. Grandfather, Barbara and I have something to say to you. It’s this.’ He puts his arm round Barbara.

COLONEL, *smiling*, ‘I know — I know. There’s nothing like it. I’m very glad, Barbara.’

BARBARA. ‘You see, dear, I’ve loved Billy boy since the days when he tried to catch the bull-trout with a string and a bent pin, and I held on to his pinafore to prevent his tumbling in. We used to play at school at marrying and giving in marriage, and the girl who was my bridegroom had always to take the name of Billy. “Do you, woman, take this man Billy—” the clergyman in skirts began, and before I could answer diffidently, some other girl was sure to shout, “I should rather think she does.”’

COLONEL, *in high good humour*, ‘Don’t forget the ring, Billy. You know, when I was married I think I couldn’t find the ring!’

KARL. ‘Were you married here, sir?’

COLONEL. ‘Yes, at the village church.’

BILLY. ‘So were my father and mother.’

COLONEL, *as his eyes wander to the garden*, ‘I remember walking back with my wife and bringing her in here through the window. She kissed some of the furniture.’

BILLY. ‘I suppose you would like a grander affair, Barbara?’

BARBARA. ‘No, just the same.’

BILLY. 'I hoped you would say that.'

BARBARA. 'But, Billy, I'm to have such a dream of a wedding gown. Granny is going with me to London, to choose it' — laying her head on the Colonel's shoulder—'if you can do without her for a day, dear.'

COLONEL, gallantly, 'I shall go with you, I couldn't trust you and granny to choose the gown.'

KARL. 'You must often be pretty lonely, sir, when we are all out and about enjoying ourselves.'

COLONEL. 'They all say that. But that is the time when I'm not lonely, Karl. It's then I see things most clearly — the past, I suppose. It all comes crowding back to me — India, the Crimea, India again — and it's so real, especially the people. They come and talk to me. I seem to see them; I don't know they haven't been here, Billy, till your granny tells me afterwards.'

BILLY. 'Yes, I know, I wonder where granny is.'

BARBARA. 'It isn't often she leaves you for so long, dear.'

COLONEL. 'She told me she had to go out, but I forget where. Oh, yes, she has gone down to the village to a wedding.'

BILLY. 'A wedding?'

BARBARA. 'It's curious how he harps on that.'

COLONEL. 'She said to me to listen and I would hear the wedding bells.'

BARBARA. 'Not today, dear.'

BILLY. 'Best not to worry him.'

BARBARA. 'But granny says we should try to make things clear to him.'

BILLY. 'Was any one with granny when she said she was going to a wedding?'

COLONEL, like one begging her to admit it, 'You were there, Barbara.'

BARBARA. 'No, dear. He said that to me before. And something about a nurse.'

COLONEL, obstinately, 'She was there, too.'

BILLY. 'Any one else?'

COLONEL. 'There was that soldier.'

BARBARA. 'A soldier also!'

COLONEL. 'Just those three.'

BILLY. 'But that makes four. Granny and Barbara and a nurse and a soldier.'

COLONEL. 'They were all there; but there were only three.'

BILLY. 'Odd.'

BARBARA, soothingly, 'Never mind, dear, Granny will make it all right. She is the one for you.'

COLONEL. 'She is the one for me.'

KARL. 'If there had been a wedding, wouldn't she have taken the Colonel with her?'

BARBARA. 'Of course she would.'

KARL. 'You are not too old to have a kind eye for a wedding, sir.'

COLONEL, wagging his head, 'Aha, aha! You know, if I had gone, very likely I should have kissed the bride. Brides look so pretty on their wedding day. They are often not pretty at other times, but they are all pretty on their wedding day.'

KARL. 'You have an eye for a pretty girl still, sir!'

COLONEL. 'Yes, I have; yes, I have!'

BARBARA. 'I do believe I see it all. Granny has been talking to you about Billy boy and me, and you haven't been able to wait; you have hurried on the wedding!'

BILLY. 'Bravo, Barbara, you've got it.'

COLONEL, *doubtfully*, 'That may be it. Because I am sure you were to be there, Barbara.'

BARBARA. 'Our wedding, Billy!'

KARL. 'It doesn't explain those other people, though.'

The Colonel moves about in agitation.

BARBARA. 'What is it, dear?'

COLONEL. 'I can't quite remember, but I think that is why she didn't take me. It is your wedding, Barbara, but I don't think Billy boy is to be there, my love.'

BARBARA. 'Not at my wedding!'

BILLY. 'Grandfather!'

COLONEL. 'There's something sad about it.'

BARBARA. 'There can't be anything sad about a wedding, dear. Granny didn't say it was a sad wedding, did she?'

COLONEL. 'She was smiling.'

BARBARA. 'Of course she was.'

COLONEL. 'But I think that was only to please the nurse.'

BARBARA. 'That nurse again! Dear, don't think any more about it. There's no wedding.'

COLONEL, *gently, though he wonders why they can go on deceiving him*, 'Is there not?'

The village wedding bells begin to ring.
The Colonel is triumphant.

COLONEL: 'I told you! There is a wedding!'

The bells ring on gaily. Billy and Barbara take a step nearer to each other, but can go no closer. The bells ring on, and the three young people fade from the scene. When they are gone and he is alone, the Colonel still addresses them.

COLONEL: 'It's Barbara's wedding. Billy boy, why are you not at Barbara's

wedding?’

Soon the bells stop. He knows that he is alone now, but he does not understand it. The sun is shining brightly, but he sits very cold in his chair. He shivers. He is very glad to see his wife coming to him through the open window. She is a dear old lady, and is dressed brightly, as becomes one who has been to a wedding. Her face beams to match her gown. She is really quite a happy woman again, for it is several years since any deep sorrow struck her; and that is a long time. No one, you know, understands the Colonel as she does, no one can soothe him and bring him out of his imaginings as she can. He hastens to her. He is no longer cold. That is her great reward for all she does for him.

ELLEN: ‘I have come back, John,’ she says, smiling tranquilly on him. ‘It hasn’t seemed very long, has it?’

COLONEL: ‘No, not long, Ellen. Had you a nice walk?’

She continues to smile, but she is watching him closely.

COLONEL: ‘I haven’t been for a walk. Don’t you remember where I told you I was going, John?’

ELLEN: ‘Yes, it was to a wedding.’ *Rather tremulously*, ‘You haven’t forgotten whose wedding, have you?’

COLONEL: ‘Tell me, Ellen.’ *He is no longer troubled. He knows that Ellen will tell him.*

ELLEN: ‘I have been seeing Barbara married, John.’

COLONEL: ‘Yes, it was Barbara’s wedding. They wouldn’t — Ellen, why wasn’t I there?’

ELLEN: *Like one telling him amusing gossip*, ‘I thought you might be a little troubled if you went, John. Sometimes your mind — not often, but sometimes if you are agitated — and then you think you see — people who aren’t here any longer. Oh dear, oh dear, help me with these bonnet strings.’

COLONEL: ‘Yes, I know. I’m all right when you are with me, Ellen. Funny, isn’t it?’

ELLEN: ‘It is funny, John. I ran back to you, John. I was thinking of you all the time — even more than of Billy boy.’

COLONEL: *very gaily*, 'Tell me all about it, Ellen. Did Billy boy lose the ring? We always said he would lose the ring.'

She looks straight into his eyes.

ELLEN: 'You have forgotten again, John. Barbara isn't married to Billy boy.'

COLONEL: *draws himself up*. 'Not marry Billy! I'll see about that.'

She presses him into his chair.

ELLEN: 'Sit down, dear, and I'll tell you something again. It is nothing to trouble you, because your soldiering is done, John; and greatly done. My dear, there is war again, and our old land is in it. Such a war as my soldier never knew.'

COLONEL: He rises. He is a stern old man. 'A war! That's it, is it? So now I know! Why wasn't I told? Why haven't I my marching orders? I'm not too old yet.'

ELLEN: 'Yes, John, you are too old, and all you can do now is to sit here and — and take care of me. You knew all about it quite clearly this morning. We stood together upstairs by the window listening to the aircraft guns.'

COLONEL: 'I remember! I thought it was a thunderstorm, Dering told me he heard nothing.'

ELLEN: 'Dering?'

COLONEL: 'Our gardener, you know.' *His voice becomes husky*. 'Haven't I been talking with him, Ellen?'

ELLEN: 'It is a long time since we had a gardener, John.'

COLONEL: 'Is it? So it is! A war! That is why there is no more cricket on the green.'

ELLEN: 'They have all gone to the war, John.'

COLONEL: 'That's it; even the little shavers.' *He whispers*, 'Why isn't Billy boy fighting, Ellen?'

ELLEN: 'Oh, John!'

COLONEL: 'Is Billy boy dead?' *She nods*. 'Was he killed in action? Tell me, tell me!'

She nods again.

COLONEL: 'Good for Billy boy. I knew Billy boy was all right. Don't cry, Ellen. I'll take care of you. All's well with Billy boy.'

ELLEN: 'Yes, I know, John.'

He hesitates before speaking again.

COLONEL: 'Ellen, who is the soldier? He comes here. He is a captain.'

ELLEN: 'He is a very gallant man, John. It is he who was married to Barbara today.'

COLONEL: *Bitterly*, 'She has soon forgotten.'

ELLEN: *shakes her brave head*. 'She hasn't forgotten, dear. And it's nearly three years now since Billy died.'

COLONEL: 'So long! We have a medal he got, haven't we?'

ELLEN: 'No, John; he died before he could win any medals.'
The Colonel moves about.

COLONEL: 'Karl will be sorry. They were very fond of each other, those two boys, Ellen.'

ELLEN: 'Karl fought against us, John. He died in the same engagement. They may even have killed each other.'

COLONEL: 'They hadn't known, Ellen.'

ELLEN: *with, thin lips*, 'I daresay they knew.'

COLONEL: 'Billy boy and Karl!'
She tells him some more gossip.

ELLEN: 'John, I had Barbara married from here because she has no people of her own. I think Billy would have liked it.'

COLONEL: 'That was the thing to do, Ellen. Nice of you. I remember everything now. It's Dering she has married. He was once my gardener!'

ELLEN: 'The world is all being re-made, dear. He is worthy of her.'
He lets this pass. He has remembered something almost as surprising,

COLONEL: 'Ellen, is Barbara a nurse?'

ELLEN: 'Yes, John, and one of the staidest and most serene. Who would have thought it of the merry madcap of other days! They are coming here, John, to say good-bye to you. They have only a few days' leave. She is in France, too, you know. She was married in her nurse's uniform.'

COLONEL: 'Was she? She told me today that — no, it couldn't have been today.'

ELLEN: 'You have been fancying you saw them, I suppose.' *She grows tremulous again.* 'You will be nice to them, John, won't you, and wish them luck? They have their trials before them.'

COLONEL: *eagerly*, 'Tell me what to do, Ellen.'

ELLEN: 'Don't say anything about Billy boy, John.'

COLONEL: 'No, no, let's pretend.'

ELLEN: 'And I wouldn't talk about the garden, John; just in case he is a little touchy about that.'

The Colonel is beginning to fancy himself as a tactician.

COLONEL: 'Not a word!'

She knows what is the way to put him on his mettle.

ELLEN: 'You see, I'm sure I would make a mess of it, so I'm trusting to you, John.'

COLONEL: *very pleased*, 'Leave it all to me, Ellen. I'll be frightfully sly. You just watch me.'

She goes to the window and calls to the married couple. Captain Dering, in khaki, is a fine soldierly figure. Barbara, in her Red Cross uniform, is quiet and resourceful. An artful old boy greets them.

COLONEL: 'Congratulations, Barbara. No, no, none of your handshaking; you don't get past an old soldier in that way. Excuse me, young man.' *He kisses Barbara and looks at his wife to make sure that she is admiring him,* 'And to you, Captain Dering — you have won a prize.'

DERING: gallantly answers, 'I know it; I'll try to show I know it.'

The Colonel is perturbed.

COLONEL: 'I haven't given Barbara a wedding present, Ellen, I should like — —'

BARBARA: *breaks in*, 'Indeed you have, dear, and a lovely one. You haven't forgotten?'

Granny signs to the Colonel and he immediately says, with remarkable cunning,

COLONEL: 'Oh — that! I was just quizzing you, Barbara. I hope you will be as happy, dear, staid Barbara, as if you had married — —' *He sees that he has nearly given away the situation. He looks triumphantly at granny as much as to say, 'Observe me; I'm not going to say a word about him.'*

Granny comes to his aid.

ELLEN: 'Perhaps Captain Dering has some little things to do: and you, too, Barbara. They are leaving in an hour, John.'

For a moment the Colonel is again in danger.

COLONEL: 'If you would like to take Barbara into the garden, Captain Dering — ' *He recovers himself instantly.* 'No, not the garden, you wouldn't know your way about in the garden.'

DERING: 'Wouldn't I, Colonel?' *the Captain says, smiling.*

The answer is quite decisive.

COLONEL: 'No, certainly not. I'll show it you some day.' *He makes gleeful signs to granny.* 'But there is a nice meadow just beyond the shrubbery. Barbara knows the way; she often went there with—' *He checks himself. Granny signs to them to go, and Barbara, kisses both the Colonel's hands.* 'The Captain will be jealous, you know,' *he says, twinkling.*

BARBARA: 'Let me, dear,' *says Barbara, arranging his cushions professionally.*

ELLEN: *nods.* 'She is much better at it than I am now, John.'

The Colonel has one last piece of advice to give.

COLONEL: 'I wouldn't go down by the stream, Barbara — not to the pool where the

alder is. There's — there's not a good view there, sir; and a boy — a boy I knew, he often — nobody in particular — just a boy who used to come about the house — he is not here now — he is on duty. I don't think you should go to the alder pool, Barbara.'

BARBARA: 'We won't go there, dear.'

She and her husband go out, and the Colonel scarcely misses them, he is so eager to hear what his wife thinks of him.

COLONEL: 'Did I do all right, Ellen?'

ELLEN: 'Splendidly. I was proud of you.'

COLONEL: *exultantly*. 'I put them completely off the scent! They haven't a notion! I can be very sly, you know, at times. Ellen, I think I should like to have that alder tree cut down. There is no boy now, you see.'

ELLEN: 'I would leave it alone, John. There will be boys again. Shall I read to you; you like that, don't you?'

COLONEL: 'Yes, read to me — something funny, if you please. About Sam Weller! No, I expect Sam has gone to the wars. Read about Mr. Pickwick. He is very amusing. I feel sure that if he had tried to catch the bull-trout he would have fallen in. Just as Barbara did this morning.'

ELLEN: 'Barbara?'

COLONEL: 'She is down at the alder pool. Billy is there with that nice German boy. The noise they make, shouting and laughing!'

She gets from its shelf the best book for war-time.

ELLEN: 'Which bit shall I read?'

COLONEL: 'About Mr. Pickwick going into the lady's bedroom by mistake.'

ELLEN: 'Yes, dear, though you almost know it by heart. You see, you have begun to laugh already.'

COLONEL: 'You are laughing too, Ellen. I can't help it!'

She begins to read; they are both chuckling.

STAGING SUGGESTIONS

How and where you might choose to stage these plays is up to you. Our intention is to make this pack available for community groups and we suggest that they work well as rehearsed ‘readings’ – with a ‘voice’ reading the stage directions giving a dramatic sense of ‘space.’ You might want to give ‘scratch’ (or unrehearsed) readings – at a community event, over a cup of tea for example. However, if you have the will and the resources to stage full productions, that’s fine by us. The plays are in the public domain and you are free to use the versions of the scripts provided in this pack for any and all rehearsal/performance purposes.

The plays have been laid out in an easy to read script format, suitable for actors to use. You can print off the relevant parts of the pack, and/or give it to readers/actors as a PDF for tablets/ereaders if you want to save paper.

Barrie’s own ‘narrations’ or ‘stage directions’ play quite an important part – and if you are giving a reading, you should definitely include them read, by a narrator. If you choose to ‘stage’ the plays then the director may find ways to include these directions in the action – but do not simply ignore them – they offer something vital to the plays. You might consider having the ‘character’ of Barrie deliver the directions within a staged production, thus placing him as character in his own drama. I feel sure he would have appreciated this, and it adds another dimension to the performance.

The commentary sections can be used for rehearsal/background information for directors and cast alike. If you quote from the commentary sections either in promotional material or any performance please attribute your source as The J.M.Barrie Literary Society ‘Echoes of the War’ Resource Pack. If you would like more dramaturgical/research input or advice please email us at jmbarriesociety@gmail.com with your inquiry and we will help where possible.

The plays will work well with amateur casts and can be performed singly or in combinations. They don’t require any real set or props (especially if the stage directions are ‘read’) as the focus remains firmly on the characters.

The New Word and *A Well Remembered Voice* might be performed together for a performance of around an hour.

Or *The New Word*, *An Old Lady Shows her Medals*, and *A Well Remembered Voice*

would work, running to approximately one and a half hours.

Der Tag and *Barbara's Wedding* might be staged together. These are perhaps less 'realistic' and thus more 'difficult' to stage effectively for the amateur, but if you have the ambition, don't let possible difficulty put you off.

Depending which combination you choose, the plays will offer a slightly different overall 'theme' and it is well worth considering the 'message' both you and Barrie are trying to convey when choosing the plays.

Available cast is also another consideration. In a reading it's much less important that the ages (or even genders) of the characters are accurate – once it's been told that x is a man/woman in his/her 30s/50s, the audience will 'buy into' it. For a staged performance without scripts and a rehearsal schedule, it's advisable to try to cast as age (and gender) appropriately as possible.

You might also consider holding some kind of talk about the themes of the plays or the context of the Great War as part of your 'event.' Making one or more of the plays part of a wider activity in a bigger commemorative event is also a good way to engage people who might otherwise not have an interest in 'drama' *per se* – getting audience participation by asking them to take the part of readers/actors is also good – but perhaps be ready to fill in if there are not enough willing recruits!

Whether you utilise a 'director' or 'facilitator' to host the proceedings, it's good to be prepared by familiarising yourself with the commentaries and considering the wider significance and context of the plays and their relevance to your own 'event.' You will present a different angle if your group or audience are predominantly school children or pensioners for example then if it's an 'interest' group such as a knitting or social gathering, or a site specific or fundraising event targeted at the general public. Be creative. Be imaginative. Be daring! (Be more Barrie).

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However you decide to perform these, we would really appreciate it if

- a) You credit The J.M.Barrie Literary Society somewhere in your promotional activity or at the time of performance and
- b) You let us know when and where you will be giving the reading/performance so that we can publicise it.

*Further research and works cited.*

We have referred to and used ideas and commentary (as well as quotes where cited) work from the following:

Andrew Birkin's book: *J.M. Barrie and the Lost Boys* (1979) – chapters 14 and 15 are particularly interesting in relation to these plays and JMB's own war experience.

Christopher Innes' article: "The Forgotten Playwright," (2002).

RDS Jack's books: *The Road to Never Land: A Reassessment of J.M. Barrie's Dramatic Art*. 1991 and *Myths and the Mythmaker* (2011 ).

Jenna Kubly's article in 'J.M. Barrie and World War I' in *Humor, Entertainment, and Popular Culture during World War I* Eds: Clémentine Tholas and Karen Ritzenhoff, (2015) and her unpublished MA Thesis: Disenchantment in the Garden: Fantasy as Social Commentary in the plays of J.M. Barrie during the Great War. (2002)

Denis Mackail's biography: *Barrie: The Story of J.M.B.* (1941).

William Phelps critique in *The North American Review* (1920).

N.P Sharma's book *The World of J. M. Barrie.* (1990).

H.M. Walbrook's book: '*J.M. Barrie and the Theatre*' (1920).

There are plenty of other sources with more general relevance to Barrie's life and works listed on our website: <http://www.jmbarriesociety.co.uk/about.html>