

Better Dead

by

J. M. Barrie

THE NOVELS, TALES AND SKETCHES OF J. M. BARRIE
BETTER DEAD

TO
FREDERICK GREENWOOD

Contents:

INTRODUCTION4

CHAPTER I6

CHAPTER II11

CHAPTER III19

CHAPTER IV27

CHAPTER V35

CHAPTER VI40

CHAPTER VII46

CHAPTER VIII50

CHAPTER IX55

CHAPTER X60

INTRODUCTION

This is the only American edition of my books produced with my sanction, and I have special reasons for thanking Messrs. Scribner for its publication; they let it be seen, by this edition, what are my books, for I know not how many volumes purporting to be by me, are in circulation in America which are no books of mine. I have seen several of these, bearing such titles as "Two of Them," "An Auld Licht Manse," "A Tillyloss Scandal," and some of them announce themselves as author's editions, or published by arrangement with the author. They consist of scraps collected and published without my knowledge, and I entirely disown them. I have written no books save those that appear in this edition.

I am asked to write a few lines on the front page of each of these volumes, to say something, as I take it, about how they came into being. Well, they were written mainly to please one woman who is now dead, but as I am writing a little book about my mother I shall say no more of her here.

Many of the chapters in "Auld Licht Idylls" first appeared in a different form in the St. James's Gazette, and there is little doubt that they would never have appeared anywhere but for the encouragement given to me by the editor of that paper. It was pressure from him that induced me to write a second "Idyll" and a third after I thought the first completed the picture, he set me thinking seriously of these people, and though he knew nothing of them himself, may be said to have led me back to them. It seems odd, and yet I am not the first nor the fiftieth who has left Thrums at sunrise to seek the life-work that was all the time awaiting him at home. And we seldom sally forth a second time. I had always meant to be a novelist, but London, I thought, was the quarry.

For long I had an uneasy feeling that no one save the editor read my contributions, for I was leading a lonely life in London, and not another editor could I find in the land willing to print the Scotch dialect. The magazines, Scotch and English, would have nothing to say to me--I think I tried them all with "The Courting of T'nowhead's Bell," but it never found shelter until it got within book-covers. In time, however, I found another paper, the British Weekly, with an editor as bold as my first (or shall we say he suffered from the same infirmity?). He revived my drooping hopes, and I was again able to turn to the only kind of literary work I now seemed to have much interest in. He let me sign my articles, which was a big step for me and led to my having requests for work from elsewhere, but always the invitations said "not Scotch--the public will not read dialect." By this

time I had put together from these two sources and from my drawerful of rejected stories this book of "Auld Licht Idylls," and in its collected form it again went the rounds. I offered it to certain firms as a gift, but they would not have it even at that. And then, on a day came actually an offer for it from Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton. For this, and for many another kindness, I had the editor of the British Weekly to thank. Thus the book was published at last, and as for Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton I simply dare not say what a generous firm I found them, lest it send too many aspirants to their doors. But, indeed, I have had the pleasantest relations with all my publishers.

"Better Dead" is, by my wish, no longer on sale in Great Britain, and I should have preferred not to see it here, for it is in no way worthy of the beautiful clothes Messrs. Scribner have given it. Weighted with "An Edinburgh Eleven" it would rest very comfortably in the mill dam, but the publishers have reasons for its inclusion; among them, I suspect, is a well-grounded fear that if I once began to hack and hew, I should not stop until I had reduced the edition to two volumes. This juvenile effort is a field of prickles into which none may be advised to penetrate--I made the attempt lately in cold blood and came back shuddering, but I had read enough to have the profoundest reason for declining to tell what the book is about. And yet I have a sentimental interest in "Better Dead," for it was my first--published when I had small hope of getting any one to accept the Scotch--and there was a week when I loved to carry it in my pocket and did not think it dead weight. Once I almost saw it find a purchaser. She was a pretty girl and it lay on a bookstall, and she read some pages and smiled, and then retired, and came back and began another chapter. Several times she did this, and I stood in the background trembling with hope and fear. At last she went away without the book, but I am still of opinion that, had it been just a little bit better, she would have bought it.