INTRODUCTION

WILLIAM STANLEY HOUGHTON was born, an only son with one sister, at Ashton-upon-Mersey, in Cheshire, on 22nd February 1881. He sprang from an old Lancashire family, originally settled at Preston, of which town he was an hereditary freeman. Down to the beginning of the eighteenth century the name in the rolls of the Preston Guild is spelt 'Hoghton': between the Guilds of 1702 and 1722 the 'u' crept in, and the name henceforth appears as Houghton. It is pronounced Hawton. As a boy he was delicate, and, though no specific ailment manifested itself apart from an attack of chorea, suffered from recurring periods of a kind of influenza accompanied by a high temperature and followed by prostration. His ill-health was, together with his parents' changes of residence, responsible for his migrations from school to school. He was educated successively at the Bowdon College, the Stockport Grammar School, the Wilmslow Grammar School, and the Manchester Grammar School. For some time he resided at Wilmslow, a Cheshire suburb of Manchester, with which another famous dramatist, Mr. Hubert Henry Davies, had early associations. Later on, in 1896,

his parents removed to Alexandra Park, Manchester, and Houghton was sent to the Manchester Grammar School, where he was contemporary with Mr. B. Iden Payne, his future producer, and Mr. Gilbert Cannan, whose play *Miles Dixon* was to be produced together with *The Younger Generation*. At each school, in spite of frequent absence, he was a great prize-winner, and appeared destined for a university career. Classics, however, were not a strong point, and at the Manchester Grammar School he was placed upon the Modern side. Asked to choose between entering his father's business, which naturally, in Manchester, is connected with the cotton trade, and the selection of a profession, he decided without hesitation upon business, with the intention, even at that time fully formed, of regarding the cotton trade as a mere stop-gap till he had perfected himself in the profession of letters.

The close of 1897, when he was nearly sixteen, saw him installed in his father's office in Meal Street, Manchester, which is now built over. He wrote somewhere an amusing description of the emotions experienced on his translation from an exalted position on the Modern side of the Grammar School to the functions of a junior office boy; and, though custom brought tolerance for a business life, he began, almost at once, the long apprenticeship through which he hoped to find emancipation from the cotton trade. The freedom for which he worked was not to come to him until the June of 1912; and some idea of how

much his 'luck' was hard work is to be had when it is remembered that, whatever his other activities, he was, from 1897 to 1912, with the exception of a business man's holidays, in daily attendance between the hours of 9 A.M. and 5 P.M. at his father's office. Through practically the whole of his working life he burnt the candle at both ends: he may indeed be said to have invented a candle combustible at once in four places.

The work itself—his position was that of a salesman—was neither arduous nor unpleasant, and had the immense advantage of bringing him, through his calls on shipping merchants and his membership of the Cotton Exchange, into intimate contact with men and affairs; but he worked, however willingly, under the strain of a constantly growing feeling that the selling of 'grey cloth' was something foreign from his true province.

No doubt he might, earlier than he did, have cut the cable and swam securely on the troubled seas of free-lance journalism. Two considerations held him back: the one a feeling that it was through drama, and drama alone, that he was to win his proper place; the other an innate Lancashire shrewdness which made him hesitate to leave security for hazard. But if writing, his fixed idea, ruled his life, Houghton was no recluse, and played a normal part in the occupations and pastimes of a young man.

Probably Houghton had no great affection for athletics, but he had a strong belief in the value of

exercise. At school he played cricket, dropping it later for lawn-tennis, at which he played a strong left-handed game with various clubs in the Whalley Range district of Manchester. Hockey, however, was the game which he played with most skill (again left-handedly) and keenness through the season, often, in addition to his club matches, joining a team from the Gaiety Theatre in mid-week contests, and playing in London with the Beckenham Club. Football he never played, and he failed to shine at golf, though twice, with some years' interval, he tried to reach a respectable handicap. Perhaps at his favourite games enthusiasm outran discretion. It is said that two sets of tennis left him exhausted, and a hard game of hockey was sometimes followed by collapse. He was a good walker; and perhaps had Mr. Anthony Ellis, who in an appreciation in the *English Review* referred to him as 'parading certain pleasant signs of dandyism,' seen Houghton tramping the Yorkshire moors attired in a Norfolk jacket, a battered deerstalker, hockey 'shorts,' and nailed boots, he would have shrunk from generalising in a phrase which nowadays suggests a euphemism for a 'nut'; and, though even a professional 'nut' may be supposed to have his 'off' hours, Houghton dressed in fact with self-respect, neatly, without fastidiousness, and certainly without exaggeration. It was not until after success had come to him that any great opportunity offered for travel—and then it came too late. But, apart from the Lake District,

North Wales, and Yorkshire resorts so readily accessible from Manchester, he had spent more than one holiday in the Channel Isles, for which he had a great affection, and had visited Paris, Normandy, and Norway. He was a competent amateur draughtsman, and a sketch-book was an invariable travelling companion. He used both pencil and pen and ink.

Socially, Houghton was widely popular, but he was at his best in the fewer intimate friendships he made than in a large gathering. In a crowded room he sought a chair upon the fringe of things, and sat alert, observing silently. He played bridge well. But, in general, he was reserved to the point of secretion. It was only when one knew him very well, and then only for a few, that the habitual reserve fell from him, and one discovered what a conversationalist he could be.

Politically, he was not active, but may be said to have professed Socialism and practised Liberalism. Politics interested him mildly as a rule, but the general election of January 1910 roused Houghton to an almost hysterical fervour which expressed itself in the columns of the *Manchester Guardian* in a series of parodies of which the following is a specimen :

There was a simple Peer
Who was honest and sincere,
But a little bit deficient as to brain;
He studied every day
All that Balfour had to say,
And read letters from a Mr. Chamberlain.

And he thought that Tory speakers meant exactly what
they said
When they told the world that British trade was dying, if
not dead.

And he very clearly saw
(After hearing Bonar Law)
That to buy things from abroad is a mistake;
'A Havana-made cigar
For the future I will bar,
I will only smoke cigars of British make.
They use the leaf of cabbage in cigars of native brand,
And that will find some Britisher employment on the land.

'I will never drink again
Any claret or champagne,
And every foreign vintage I 'll decline;
I very often bought
Eighteen-eighty-seven port,
But I 'll buy in future only British wine.
For that will find employment for some Britishers (said he)
A-plucking elderberries from the elderberry tree.

'To let Caruso sing
Is an ill-considered thing,
Or to listen to La Tetrazzini's trills;
Those who Paderewski hear
Are not patriots, I fear,
Nor are those who take delight in Bernhardt's thrills.
For perhaps some village Irving of his livelihood they rob,
Or some mute inglorious Santley who is looking for a job.'

Naturally, his fervour took a literary form; inevitably, for such an occasion, it did not take a high form. Election squibs must be popular or nothing. In the same article in the *English Review*

already referred to, a rather wild view of Houghton's political thinking is taken. A 'rebel' he never was. For a short time he was a member of the Clarion Club, and there are traces, at least, of Socialist, and especially feminist, thinking in *Independent Means*; but one always felt that Houghton's excursions, both in fact and idea, into the by-ways were made not so much from even passing conviction as solely and deliberately for purposes of observation. He was, as every artist must be, the looker-on.

On two occasions he used the correspondence columns of the *Manchester Guardian* in defence of freedom. The first had reference to the withholding of a drink licence from the Gaiety Theatre. 'Though I distrust,' he wrote, 'both the extreme teetotal interest and the brewing interest, I distrust the extreme teetotal interest the more heartily. I regard it as intolerable that Messrs. —— should oblige me not to call for a glass of beer inside the Gaiety Theatre. Consider the alternative. Suppose that these gentlemen were only permitted to enter the Gaiety on condition that they did have a drink; and, if they declined, suppose that they were held while the liquor was poured down their throats. They would consider, and rightly, that their personal liberty was being interfered with grossly. But there is not an atom of difference between the justice or logic of this supposed case, and that of the state of affairs now prevailing.' The Gaiety got its licence.

The second occasion was when the Libraries

Committee of the Manchester City Council proposed to ban Mr. H. G. Wells' *The New Machiavelli*. Houghton's letter 'drew' Dr. Moulton from his fastness of Didsbury College, and Dr. Moulton, in turn, 'drew' Mr. Arnold Bennett.

Practically from the time of his leaving school, Houghton was a member of the Manchester Athenæum, a many-sided institution, which he used for its news-room, its library, and its amateur dramatic society. In 1908 he was one of a number of men who founded a luncheon-club, under the name of the Swan Club, for daily discussion of food and art round a table whose size limited severely the membership. The 'Swan' emblem which appears on his plays was designed by a fellow-member of the club, Mr. Ernest Marriott, by whom one had to be caricatured before reaching full membership. Here, as elsewhere, Houghton's constant habit, not of isolation, for an observer must not isolate himself, but of insulation, made him perhaps the least clubbable of the band, but he found old friends and made new and enduring friendships round the Swan Club table.

It was noteworthy how, after his success, reserve left him. Even before London had smiled his Manchester achievements had made him the best-known of the club, and in his anxiety not to presume inside upon his reputation outside, he was, at times, almost morbidly shy, expressing opinions only after pressure, and then with diffidence. London had

cured him of self-consciousness, and no memories of Houghton are more pleasant than those of the few visits he paid to the Swan Club table after he had ceased to live in Manchester. Success, which mars so many, mellowed him. It was as if Manchester had stunted him; released from it, he developed as far in six months of London and Paris as in six years of Manchester. Unrecognised by the world he was, as a clubman, difficult: successful, he became a comrade, a talker, giving out from himself where before he was too often, through sheer shyness, contented only to receive.

In 1912 he became a member of the Savage Club, finding its lack of pomp congenial, and in the same year was made, greatly to his delight, a member of that very select band, the Dramatists' Club.

With the production of *Hindle Wakes* in June 1912 came Houghton's opportunity to release himself from business. Characteristically, he made assurance doubly sure before he took the final step. The London Press rang with his praises, but Houghton waited for more substantial guarantees. When, however, besides *Hindle Wakes*, an arrangement was made for the Haymarket production of *The Younger Generation*, he shook from his feet the dust of the cotton trade; and after writing, in the first flush of his success and his freedom, the genial play *The Perfect Cure*, left Manchester for London. Exactly what was the origin of the obscure disease which struck him down is a matter on which doctors disagree,

and the layman may theorise freely. He had suffered, before *Hindle Wakes* came, from complicated tooth trouble: a small operation was suggested, but the pain had ceased, and the operation did not take place. Possibly, and it is at least as reasonable a theory as the suggestion that toxin was introduced later through eating bad food, the poisonous matter was first present in his system so long before his death as the autumn of 1912. At any rate, whether or not the ill-health at this time was the origin of, or merely incidental to, the fatal illness, from then onwards Houghton was a sick man. Evidence is to be found in the plays which he wrote for Mr. Arthur Bourchier. The plays were written rapidly, but he always wrote fast, and that hitherto had not damaged his work. With ill-health there was also the extraordinary mental and characteristic development already noted, the one, no doubt, acting and reacting on the other. It was an abnormal Houghton who tasted the fruits of the normal Houghton's triumphs.

He took first a flat in Charing Cross Road, but found, after a very few months spent in discovering London, that the central position, if convenient for him, was convenient for others to come and interrupt him. Steady work was impossible to a man who found himself lionised by society, caricatured by Mr. Max Beerbohm, badgered by editors, tempted by commissions from managers (most of which he declined), and courted by his own profession. The whirl for a time amused him, but it did not satisfy.

He found a bewildering array of acquaintances and, amongst men of the theatre, a few true friends—Mr. Cyril Hogg, his first publisher, Mr. Edward Knoblauch, Mr. Frank Vernon. But he tired quickly of a life lived so much in the limelight, and, after a Christmas visit to Manchester, fled early in 1913 to Paris, staying at a little hotel in the Palais Royal, in order to be near his friend Mr. Edward Knoblauch. A flat in Paris was a dream of his Manchester days. He took one shortly, six flights up, in the Place d'Italie on the Rive Gauche, but, before furnishing, felt ill and went to recuperate at his loved St. Brelade's Bay, Jersey, from which, after a first depressed letter, he wrote cheerfully of the enlivening company of a party of Cambridge undergraduates. Returned to Paris he enjoyed hugely his furnishing expeditions, was better in health, and wrote optimistic letters with gay little serio-comic plans of the 'Flat at No. 6 Rue Bobillot, Paris, in the occupancy of Stanley Houghton, Esq.' This flat he was to occupy for just one month. A dream indeed! Here is a quotation from a letter he wrote in May 1913 describing his routine. He had mentioned meeting Mr. James Pryde, Mr. William Nicholson, and other people, and had been accused of associating with 'nobs.' In reply:

'Damn your "nobs." There 's only Knoblauch, and I haven't seen him for a fortnight. I am too busy now to go across the water. I get up at eight, prepare my chocolate, shave, and dress; the *femme*

de ménage comes at nine; I go to work in the study till about a quarter to twelve, then lunch in the dining-room (she does excellent light lunches); and, after coffee and a liqueur and rest on the balcony, I continue work for as long as I feel inclined, perhaps till four, when I may have tea, or else go out for a walk, or to see some one, and have tea there. For dinner I usually go about a mile and a half away, to the corner of Bd. du Montparnasse and Bd. Raspail, where there are two or three good and cheap places. There is also one below in the Place d'Italie if I don't want to go away. But generally I like to go away; to walk if I have had no other exercise, or I can take the Métro or a tram if I am tired or it is wet. Then after dinner, if I am with people, perhaps to a café or a studio, and so home to bed, sometimes very late (when one has gone on to the Bal Bullier or the Panthéon), sometimes reasonably early.

'This sounds as if I know lots of people. I don't, but there is a little group of four or five, American girl artists and Englishmen, and then a young German, and one can ring the changes. I can already see that my place here is admirably chosen; it is just enough out of the way to prevent people dropping in on the chance of finding me at home. Really, this is the first time I have found peace since I left Manchester, and the proof is that I want to work and am actually doing so, even in spite of the time taken up by domestic affairs. At what, you say? At a novel. *Life*, by Stanley Houghton.

I'm afraid it's been used. I am quite absorbed in it, and work at it as I haven't done at anything since *Hindle Wakes*. One has the feeling that nothing can ever spoil the work when you've done it, no worry of rehearsals and actors can ever come between your effect and the public. Of course I don't mean that I shall stop writing plays . . .'

The novel, of which six chapters will be found in the succeeding pages, was to extend to sixty thousand words; and though an attempt has been made to trace its intended course, the brief synopsis must be taken as a hint, and no more, of its scope. Houghton's notes for the plot are the equivalent of the first rough jottings it was his habit to make in the case of a play before elaborating into a full scenario. But enough of the novel was written to prove that the visit to Jersey had mentally invigorated him, and that the book, if completed, would have secured for Houghton a reputation as a novelist hardly inferior to that which he enjoyed as a dramatist. That *Life* was not the only novel he had intended to write is shown by the following note from his commonplace book. 'For a novel: Framework of my article "Hawthorn Lodge," with the house getting bigger as the family disperses. Title, *Home*.'

In June he returned to London for rehearsals of *The Perfect Cure*, paid a flying visit to Manchester, and after production of the play returned to Paris. There he was ill, and thought his illness merely the result of a bad crossing. Feeling better after a

day's rest, he went on to Venice, where Mr. Edward Sheldon, the American dramatist, had invited him. Again he was ill, and the English doctor diagnosed, with some reserve, influenza. After a fortnight an instant operation for acute appendicitis became necessary. From this he was, to all appearances, making headway, when a second dangerous operation was performed without anæsthetic for the removal of an abscess at the base of the lung. His parents had been summoned and were present. Again, he seemed to recover, slowly but surely, and the poison, still present in the body, to be diminishing. Venice in the autumn is not a health resort, and in October he was brought for nursing and home surroundings to Manchester, standing the journey satisfactorily, and, to all seeming, well on the slow road to health. It was then, more than ever, that those friends who were allowed to see him were impressed with the amazing gain in breadth of outlook, of maturity. Faced with the certain prospect of a long convalescence, of at least a year out of the arena, he was more than patient. He was cheerful, not merely taking an invalid's privilege of being talked at, but insisting on brilliantly leading the conversation. Then, with but little warning, the poison reached the brain, meningitis set in, and he died on 11th December 1913. His remains were cremated, and his ashes lie in the grounds of the Manchester crematorium.

Apprenticeship

Houghton left school with the definite intention of becoming a writer. As a first step he became an enormous and catholic reader. He converted his schoolboy French into a practicable instrument. He made experiments in writing, already directing his efforts towards the stage, and in 1900-1 wrote little comic operas and farces which were performed by amateur actors of whom the author was one. These were followed by some one-act plays, *After Naseby, The Last Shot, The Blue Phial,* the nature of which is sufficiently indicated by their titles. They were garrulous, but, on the technical side, give clear signs of the extraordinary workmanship which was to characterise his maturer plays. Possibly, a young writer, beginning his experiments to-day, would not elect to enter the dramatic field through the medium of farce and melodrama. If so, it would be because his artistic birth came later than Houghton's. Young artists must imitate something: what was there to imitate in 1900 for a man living in the provinces and so cut off from the occasional 'uncommercial' productions of London? The Vedrenne-Barker management had not begun to reshape dramatic history at the Court Theatre; and perhaps, in any case, the truer wisdom lies in trying one's wings on lower ground.

In 1902-3 came the first three-act play, a mixture of comedy, melodrama, and farce, with a plot which,

wordy as its treatment is, has no little ingenuity. The dialogue is unequal, but shows Houghton's individual manner already forming itself. If here he derives from Wilde, the spare economy of the later plays is the vital characteristic of the writing. Each year, from 1903 to 1907, he wrote at least one short play. Of these, one, *The Old Testament and the New*, written in 1905, is printed in the following pages as an example of his early work. This period, closing with the end of 1907, is here arbitrarily taken to represent his novitiate. Not that he himself would have closed the list at this point. To the end he was, in his own judgment, still the industrious apprentice with his maturer work to come.

Drama was his aim, but play-writing was only one part of his training. There remain to be recorded in this section his activities as an amateur actor and his early work as a dramatic critic.

Amateur acting is either a social pastime, or it is a serious career. Houghton took it seriously, with the deliberate purpose of acting in as many plays as possible, and learning from each all it had to teach him of the playwright's craft. How seriously he took it may be judged from the fact that between 1901 and 1912 he appeared in over seventy parts, and after the first year or two they were not small parts. There are programmes recording his appearances in such parts as Vere Quecket in *The Schoolmistress*, The Duke of Guisebury in *The Dancing Girl*, Major Saranoff in *Arms and The Man*, the Waiter in *You*

Never Can Tell, Sir Daniel Ridgley in *His House in Order*, and Sir Jennings Pike in *Little Mary*: in addition to which he frequently acted as producer, and for a period found time to be Secretary to the Manchester Athenæum Dramatic Society. The more one thinks about it, the more amazing grows the sheer quantity of work which Houghton packed, always without apparent effort, into his short life. Omitting, as one must, the summer months, his seventy odd parts give an average of over one a month—all to be memorised and rehearsed, and Houghton was too great a hater of slovenliness to be anything but 'word-perfect' in his acting. The parts enumerated not only show how much his acting was in demand, but prove an unusual versatility, and the whole catalogue of his appearances undoubtedly offers a wider range of experience to an alert student than most professional actors could hope to secure in a similar period.

It was not merely the architecture of the plays which interested him. He studied with equal care the technique of the actor, and the result is to be seen in the admirable acting quality of his dialogue. Lines which appear certain of their effect at rehearsal sometimes fail to make their point apparent to an audience. Houghton wanted to know why, and never rested till he had hit upon the precise delivery which, to his mind, would have conveyed to the audience the full significance of the line. He brought to rehearsals of his own plays not only the knowledge

of his intentions, but a carefully considered scheme for the exact delivery of each particular line.

One or two further points should be mentioned. He must of course have had a genuine love of acting for its own sake. Long after he had become a practising dramatist he continued to act, and one of the happiest incidents of his later acting days was his appearance as James Henry Kennion in his own *The Younger Generation*. Much earlier he had already ' created ' on the stage a character of, partly at least, his own imagining. In October 1906 a play entitled *The Intriguers*, written by Houghton in collaboration with a well-known amateur actor, Mr. Frank Nasmith, was produced by the Athenæum Society. Both authors took part in the production. The play, which was in four acts, was melodrama, and may be described as a steeplechase over very rough country after a packet of stolen naval plans. There was, later, a romantic play in one act, *The Reckoning*, by the same collaborators, which had a professional production at the now extinct Queen's Theatre in Manchester in 1907, and afterwards a career as a music-hall sketch.

Houghton's early experience of dramatic criticism was won in the columns of a weekly paper, the *Manchester City News*, which he represented between March 1905 and September 1906 on some sixty occasions at the theatres, and also wrote about music-halls. Here again is evidence of the indomitable hunt for experience. The work was unpaid; he

was a supernumerary critic, the plums going to other hands; and the smaller Manchester music-halls and suburban theatres, to which he often went, can hardly have had much interest for him. But he was learning to write, to discover the difference between the written and the printed word, and to express his thoughts concisely in the small space allotted him.

The ' Manchester Guardian '

The ' later period ' begins with his association with the *Manchester Guardian*, of which his opinion was that of Robert Brindley in Mr. Arnold Bennett's tale.[1] Houghton's enjoyment of his later success was as nothing to the pride he took in writing for the *Manchester Guardian*, and mixing with the men of the *Guardian*—Mr. C. E. Montague, Mr. G. H. Mair, Mr. Herbert Sidebotham, and, his closest friend amongst them all, Mr. A. N. Monkhouse, who in a few years was to head with Houghton the ' Manchester School ' of drama. He never held an appointment on the staff, but, from 1907 to 1912, was a frequent ' occasional ' contributor under the heads of dramatic criticism, book reviewing, and special articles.

Houghton had strong views on the propriety of a practising dramatist acting as dramatic critic, and

[1] ' I 've often heard that it 's a very good paper,' I said politely. ' It isn't a very good paper,' he laid me low. ' It 's the best paper in the world.'

on this subject had a passage of arms with Mr. Hall Caine in 1910, which, though applying only to a special case, serves to illustrate his attitude. Houghton had a play at the Gaiety Theatre, Mr. Caine had one at the Princes'. (By the way, it is hardly necessary to explain that the words 'Gaiety Theatre,' when used in these pages, refer to Miss Horniman's theatre in Manchester, and not to the national institution in the Strand. Made clear at once, there is no need to write 'Manchester' with every reference to the theatre.) Houghton adversely criticised Mr. Caine's play in the *Manchester Guardian*; Mr. Caine promptly protested in the columns of another paper against the *Guardian's* putting one dramatist in a position to decry the wares of another. Houghton's reply, in the same paper, was as follows:

'SIR,—My attention has been drawn to Mr. Hall Caine's letter in your paper of yesterday. Mr. Caine, I observe, puts on one side all question of the æsthetic value of his plays and of my criticisms of his plays—and concentrates upon a point of journalistic ethics. I do not quite understand whether his quarrel is with me for going to the theatre, or with the editor of the *Manchester Guardian* for sending me, but, in any case, his letter concerning a particular case raises a larger issue which has been debated frequently, and which is still unsettled. May a man who is doing creative literary work of his own sit in judgment upon the work of other men? In my

opinion he may, provided he make no attempt to conceal his identity.

'Now it is foolish of Mr. Caine to insinuate that there was any difficulty in discovering who was the writer of the *Manchester Guardian* notices of his plays. If I had wished to hide my authorship of the articles, I should not have gone to the trouble of signing them with my initials. Moreover, it seems to me that what the *Manchester Guardian* said about Mr. Caine's play and my own is quite beside the point. I do not agree with him that the notice of my play was "almost entirely eulogistic," though there is little doubt that the notice of his play was "wholly condemnatory," as he puts it. But is it quite inconceivable that some one should have written a better play than Mr. Caine, for once in a way?

'It will be found, I dare assert, that most of both the dramatic criticisms and novel reviews appearing in the better sort of journal in this country are written by people who write books and plays themselves. Any man is justified in taking the view that this is not right. But it is in my mind that Mr. Hall Caine, when adversely criticised in the *Times* two or three years ago, referred to Mr. A. B. Walkley in a pungent phrase which left no doubt of his contempt for the opinions of a critic who was not a creative artist as well. Now, Mr. Caine objects to being criticised by me because I do write plays. He cannot have it both ways; a critic must either have or have not written a play. The only inference one can draw

from these two public pronouncements is that Mr. Caine objects to criticism of any sort, like the famous actress who said that gross flattery was quite good enough for her.

'That one playwright should write about the work of another is not the same as that a doctor or a barrister should write about another of his profession. The cases are not analogous. Doctors and barristers —unlike Mr. Hall Caine and myself—are not permitted to advertise themselves.

'Let us hope that we shall both do well out of the present correspondence.—Yours, etc.,

'STANLEY HOUGHTON.'

Mr. Caine did not reply.

It has been said that as a critic Houghton was unduly severe. His remarks about *The Night of the Party* drew a protest from Mr. Weedon Grossmith, but careful reference to his criticisms in general fails to disclose evidence to sustain the charge. The strongest sentences one is able to find—in each case, as it happens, written of novels—are (1) 'to like this novel much one would have to mistake stupidity for chivalry, and to be interested in women with big innocent eyes and brains like rabbits'; and (2) 'a piece of shameless sentimentality. It is a congregation of all the tricks that ever were for creating the amiable impression that the reign of King George III. was an epoch of sugar-icing, or if not *all* the tricks, at least the more obvious ones.' The fact is, he was

an absolutely sincere critic. Incompetence was abhorrent to his essentially tidy mind, and if he found incompetence allied with pretension he said hard things of it. He gave no quarter to a shoddy book or play by an author of reputation. Celebrities, who in his estimation did not deserve renown, were treated with the same candour as aspiring nonentities, and in the columns of the *Manchester Guardian* the business manager does not intervene. On the other hand he could praise, and praised with generosity. A case in point is his criticism, here quoted entire, of *Romeo and Juliet*. Plainly, he went to see this performance by a touring company with expectations of a dull evening. He was pleasantly surprised, and said so with refreshing zeal:

'First let it be said that the performance of *Romeo and Juliet* given by Miss Glossop-Harris and Mr. Frank Cellier and their company last night was no ordinary one. After an uncertain beginning, a rather sketchy brawl in the public place at Verona, and an unsatisfying festivity at Capulet's, it found itself in the orchard scene; and thence the tragedy marched forward with ever-growing intensity until it reached a fitting and noble climax in the monument. It has been said that it is the fate of English Romeos and Juliets to grow too old to look their parts before they have attained sufficient technical ability properly to play them. This company is young all through; the enthusiasm of unbruised youth with unstuff'd brain attacks this play of

burning youth and death-marked love, and each takes fire from the other. Crudely acted as it was in parts, inadequately (and often inappropriately) as it was staged, a genuinely tragic tide swelled up in the theatre and swept us away on its crest.

'Miss Glossop-Harris was the Juliet and Mr. Eugène Wellesley the Romeo; and these two, if they did not bring to their physical fitness for their parts a perfect technical equipment, are at least practised actors, and possess a control over their emotions and temperaments that is quite sufficient for all practical purposes. The balcony scene was played charmingly, with the most engaging fragrance and simplicity; the blank verse was spoken not only as if it meant something, but as if the speakers were actually thinking about what it meant, not measuring off so many lengths of figured verbiage. Miss Harris was fresh and limpid as spring water, and Mr. Wellesley was really passionate and not sentimental. Later on both of these players gave ampler proofs of the variety and scope of their powers in more trying passages, and each touched a high level of austerity and spareness in the scene of the tomb.

'We are not accustomed to distribute indiscriminate or exaggerated praise, but it is really astonishing to find a company, unknown in Manchester and containing no eminent star actors, giving a better performance of *Romeo and Juliet* than any touring company has given here for years, we imagine. And the chief charm about the whole affair is a complete

absence of any sort of rhodomontade or "side." Mr. Cellier contents himself with Friar Lawrence, a part which he plays with dignity and discretion, and all the rest of the company, even the incompetents—and there are one or two—play into one another's hands unselfishly like a band of brothers. This afternoon the rarely acted *Love's Labour's Lost* is actually to be done.'

It was the same with novels, and, since two verdicts of some harshness have been quoted, it is but fair here to give at full length his view of two books which pleased him. Both are by authors whose reputations, at the time, were to make, and both found Houghton eager to exalt them:

'A Sea Story.—She rides amid the reefs and creeps into the curious corners of the sea. The crash and clatter of her whirring tackle strike the echoes from the crags and break the solemn silence of the shoals. In her harsh grasp she grips the wreck and plucks it from destruction, hurrying about her frenzied task at all hours and in all weathers. The steam hisses and splutters in the bitter night under the flash of her humming blue arcs, and in the hot August afternoon the sea-water gurgles and belches through her armoured hose. A queer craft, this salvage ship, a queer craft from truck to keel; with a queer crew—always working furiously—amid the chaos of their floating factory. And Mr. Maurice Drake, in this

new novel of his, with the sombre title of *Wrack*, gives us an extraordinary impression of the craft and the crew. The salving of the Masai, and later on the voyage of the Thames-to-Tyne collier, are passages of almost sensationally vivid description. Mr. Drake does not ransack the ends of the earth in his quest of the romantic; he finds adventure no further away than a reef off the Longships, he finds beauty in the Thames lights seen from the deck of a grimy coal-carrier.

'About a third of the way through the book we caught the flick of a petticoat. "Shameless Mr. Drake!" we cried. "Are you going to spoil a fascinating account of something you know intimately by weak-kneed concession to the sentimentalists?" Never did we make a greater mistake. The flick of the petticoat gave the story a twist that transformed it magically from a mere absorbing description into something very much finer. Mr. Drake is not of set purpose a moralist; he is a novelist, as Ibsen was a dramatist, first of all; but all fine work is profoundly moral, and *Wrack* is even terrifyingly moral. We wish we could say, too, that Mr. Drake is not a politician. He has a grievance—the practical disfranchisement of sailors and the consequent neglect of their interests by governments—and he has not been able to keep this King Charles's head out of his story. We cannot blame him for wishing to voice a complaint for which there are no doubt just grounds, but we cannot quite forgive him for allowing his

grievance to make a fine and splendidly true novel ring just a little false in the final chapters.'

'The True and the Strange.—An admirable novel, from which one has had no ordinary amount of pleasure, is *The Bracknels*, by Forrest Reid. It is called a 'family chronicle,' and perhaps it is a pity thus to label any story on the title-page. In the first place the description is not a distinctive one nowadays, when the family with its various constituents packed neatly together like specimens in a case is a favourite and fruitful subject for study; and in the second place, in family novels it is not the chronicle of events that interest us, but the delving underneath the top crust of events, and the demonstration of secret reasons and of hidden consequences. *The Bracknels* is full of the relationships between people so closely packed together, as it were, as to be constantly treading on each other's toes and digging each other in the ribs. It is full of those curious little episodes that don't lead anywhere, and that are yet so illuminating; episodes strange, not obvious and most natural. Again and again you are struck by the rightness of things done in ticklish situations; and always you recognise that the way out, though not foreseen, is entirely appropriate, and the recognition causes a glow of pleasure. It is like continually testing silver pieces and finding them all ring true. In the authenticity and discrimination of its incident *The Bracknels* reminds us of Mr.

Forster's *Howards End*; and like that fascinating book its first half is concerned principally with embarrassments, refinements of character, and niceties of conduct, and in the second half it breaks out a trifle, or runs a little wild. But, in truth, we must not forget that queer things come to pass under family roofs as well as on romantic coasts; nor that by placid firesides apparently composed breasts do sometimes seethe.

'One has tried to make it clear that even if the story were nothing more than a chronicle of small beer it would still be excellent, but some full-blooded people find that a mosaic of the bits of daily life does not satisfy their voracious appetites. They call such composition grey, even though underneath the ashes passion is glowing like a red ember; so it is well there is something more to be said. Standing out against the background of mosaic (which has been done well many times before) is a character that has hardly been done at all before, though one recalls a hint or sketch of such a character in a short story, curiously enough, again by Mr. Forster. That character is the boy Denis, whom the doctor calls a "psychological conundrum," and whom the other Bracknels with more or less understanding dub "queer" and "mad." On Sabbaths he sits in the Presbyterian pew, and on summer midnights he satisfies his soul with pagan rites at an altar in a hawthorn grove, his body bared to the whiteness of the moon. No attempt is made to explain the phenomenon, and

you may, if you choose, accept it as a sort of case of religious atavism; or you may (since the supernatural things are shown, skilfully, only through the eyes of Denis himself) say simply that the lad is crazy, as the stupid Bracknels do. Anyhow, to our mind the author has drawn this charming unearthly boy with extraordinary sympathy and penetration, and in doing so has raised the book to a rarer level and touched it with a more beautiful strangeness.'

Nor did his appreciation end with the printed word. He sang everywhere the praises of a book he liked: he kept review copies on his shelves: he bought the author's later books. This is the place, perhaps, to instance further his practical generosity. In London, after his chance had come, he would continually cry in the market-place the merits of others of the 'Manchester School,' even in the ears of managements who had his own plays under consideration. People, too, who were trying their hands at writing got into the habit of sending him plays for criticism, which always was ungrudgingly and helpfully given. Once or twice he did more than criticise. Mr. C. A. Forrest, whom he then knew only as a fellow-member of a hockey club, wrote a fine one-act play entitled *The Shepherd*, and asked Houghton for his opinion. He got it and more; Houghton never rested till the play was accepted for production by both Miss Horniman and the Liverpool Repertory Theatre. Mr. Forrest's plays are good enough on their merits,

but at the beginning the best dramatic wine needs all the bush available, and Houghton was there to lend a helping hand. Similarly, later on, Mr. J. F. Haylock, a Manchester journalist, sent him a one-act play, which, very shortly, was to be seen as curtain-raiser to *Hindle Wakes* on tour.

The remainder of his work for the *Manchester Guardian* consisted of the articles, mostly character sketches, which are reprinted here. As a sidelight and a further proof of his habit of meaning what he said, it may be mentioned that, when success brought with it means, he purchased the Beerbohm caricature of Mr. Arnold Bennett, to which he alludes in 'Anniversaries and Old Letters.' The articles are not numerous, but one notes in Houghton, working through the simpler medium, an outlook more mature than that which found expression in his plays. His mind, unhampered by the limitations of the stage, here shot ahead; and it is upon these articles, considered in conjunction with the marked change which, in the last year of his life, took place in the man himself, that one bases with confidence the assertion that the unwritten plays of his future would have revealed a stronger purpose and a deeper vision.

The Plays

The plays are here arranged in two groups: (1) long plays and (2) one-act plays, the items of each group being placed chronologically. Before considering them individually, in order of writing, a few notes on

Houghton's procedure may be of interest, even if intending playwriters find information of no more practical assistance than would a cook the recipe 'First catch your hare, then cook it!' First, Houghton caught his idea, then came a period of incubation, during which a small notebook was carried for the jotting-down of constructive points and scraps of dialogue. The full scheme of *Hindle Wakes* was sketched on a few scattered papers of a penny notebook. From this stage his plays grew shapely in his mind, to emerge in the form of a complete scenario, with every character decided and each scene in outline to the last. There was, with Houghton, no ecstatic dashing at a play, directly from the coming of its subject to the first act, with the almost inevitable 'petering out' of material before reaching the third act. He knew the full course of his play before he wrote a line of dialogue. This is not to say that his periods of incubation were long. He was, on the contrary, an extremely rapid worker. The mere bulk of his work proves that, especially when his daily office hours and the various activities already recorded are remembered. Ideas, perhaps, came slowly to him. There were intervals between his plays when he felt that he had struck a barren patch. Minds, like fields, must lie fallow sometimes. But from the moment of deciding on his subject, progress was extraordinarily rapid. *The Younger Generation* was written in two months, *Hindle Wakes* in three.

From the scenario he wrote the dialogue, rarely rewriting, and never more than once. Down to 1911 he wrote by hand. His writing was small and neat, a spare workmanlike hand, free from flourishes, eminently legible. Later, he used a typewriter, typing the play from the scenario, correcting with a pen. It is remarkable that his few alterations were not improvements. They were, in fact, in the nature of concessions. The line, as written, would be the sincere result of authentic observation; the alteration a sop to the pit, a line to win a laugh. It is, naturally, in the earlier plays, written before he gained self-confidence, that this tendency appears more freely. But it is there, to some extent, throughout; the surrender of the artist, still distrustful of his powers, to the man who knew the theatre through and through and feared to aim 'above their heads.' This is not theorising elaborately to excuse the occasional cheapness of his dialogue: it is simple fact, demonstrable from the written manuscript where the original line is good and the revision is a cheapening.

In the autumn of 1907 Miss A. E. F. Horniman initiated at the Midland Theatre, Manchester, the first Repertory Company in Great Britain. By the spring of 1908 she had acquired the Gaiety Theatre, and established it upon the lines which made it famous. The plays, selected by Miss Horniman and produced with more than a touch of genius by Mr. Iden Payne, set up at once a new dramatic standard for the provinces. Plays of the class presented had, it is true, been seen locally, but they had rarely had a chance to show themselves for what they were. 'Intellectual' plays, sloppily produced by managements whose resources fail to square with their ambitions, are the dreariest mischances of the theatre. Miss Horniman changed all that, and, watching her early plays, Houghton discovered his medium with his opportunity. The melodramatic trend of his 'first period' was buried for ever. Henceforth, he wooed the Comic Muse.

His connection with the Gaiety Theatre, which was to close with its most popular success, began with the production on 2nd November 1908 of the one-act play *The Dear Departed* (April to May 1908). Originally, like his earlier work, the play was too long—it would have occupied forty-five minutes in action—and required pruning under strong managerial guidance. The programme of its first production, as curtain-raiser to *Widower's Houses*, bears an acknowledgment of indebtedness for an idea to a story of de Maupassant; but the subject is universal, and, later, the acknowledgment was omitted.

'These things,' wrote Mr. C. E. Montague, 'are a kind of dramatic common or open space. Every dramatist, new and old, has equal rights over them. What matters is the way the rights are used. And Mr. Houghton, in using them, shows a pretty turn of observation, a fresh, quick relish for the harsh humours of the situation; and also a capital sense of theatrical values in such cases as the comic effect of

the daughter and son-in-law visibly struggling with the supposed dead man's furniture, and of the small girl coming in and promptly cutting through the whole web of adult sophistry with the remark, " Then we *have* pinched it." '

Since its production *The Dear Departed* has been frequently played by Miss Horniman's company in Manchester and at the Coronet Theatre, London. It was translated into French as *Défunt Merry* in 1911 by Louis Pennequin, and acted in translation in Holland during the same year. From May 1913 to February 1914 it was acted at the Criterion Theatre.

The Dear Departed was followed in August 1909 by Houghton's first long play, *Independent Means* (October to December 1908), a work not wholly satisfying, showing as it proceeds a sort of galloping consumption of tissue and a reliance upon technique to pull matters through. The play finds a natural place in the present edition, both as the first full-length production, and as showing Houghton expressing in drama, though still fumblingly, the results of his inspired observation of suburban life. It reflects also, as already noted, his Clarion Club experience, but the wildest hater of propaganda in art could hardly call *Independent Means* didactic. One is chiefly interested in the technical side of the play. Just as Houghton sometimes a little underrated the intelligence of his audience, so at first he greatly overrated the difficulty of technique. In this play technique, which was to be his slave, became for once

his tyrant. His acting experience had taught him all there was to know, but he had still to learn how certainly his craft was mastered, how little cause he had to fear the bogey of technique. Meantime, in his uncertainty, he did it too much honour, and the last act of *Independent Means* is a case of technique and very little else. The play had several revivals at the Gaiety Theatre, and was toured in 1913-14 by Mr. Iden Payne's company. It has not been played in London.

Marriages in the Making (January to April 1909) is light comedy of slight texture, hardly living up to the promise of its first act, but thoroughly amusing to the end. Houghton's observation of the minor society of Cheshire was not so full as that of the 'Salchester' suburbs; his types here tend more to the purely conventional; but the dialogue is quite characteristic, and has the flavour of his individual style, not at its best, but already astringent, with lines in it which come like a blow in the face from wind-borne spray. This play has not been acted.

The Younger Generation (November and December 1909) was produced by Miss Horniman in November 1910, frequently revived by her, played in London under the management of Mr. Frederick Harrison at the Haymarket and Duke of York's theatres from November 1912 to March 1913, in America under Mr. Charles Frohman, and in the provinces under Mr. Iden Payne. It is, therefore, after *Hindle Wakes*, Houghton's most successful play. In form it is

wholly modern; in spirit perhaps a little out of date. Its form shows Houghton completely master of his craft, no longer to be terrified by technique, with his tyrant of *Independent Means* obediently his slave. It is compact, incisive, with every word of its entertaining dialogue precisely placed and nicely weighed to bring its meaning home. Its technical accomplishment astonished Mr. William Archer. 'Quite admirable,' he wrote in 1910, 'are the technical ease and finish which he displays in this very entertaining and apposite study of middle-class life in Lancashire. When Ibsen was asked how he set about making a play, he said that he took some real-life incident that had come within his ken, threw in a little poetry—and the thing was done. Mr. Stanley Houghton, having no leanings Ibsenwards, does not throw in any poetry. Not merely in expression, but in conception and structure as well, his play is a piece of very sober prose. . . . How is it, I often ask myself with astonishment, that so many young men in the provinces have suddenly awakened, as it were, to find themselves workmanlike, and even accomplished, playwrights? The reason is partly, no doubt, that the new generation has learnt what *not* to do; but it nevertheless remains astonishing that so many of them should have mastered, seemingly without effort, the difficult art of compressing their observations of life into the narrow dimensions of the theatre.'

The value of the treatment is in the veracious and

amusing social portraiture. But, though the portraiture is absolutely authentic and observed from identifiable originals, the attitudes of parents and children suggest, for 1910, a social backwater rather than the broad stream of life. It is not that Houghton chose, as a symbol of revolt, Arthur Kennion's drunkenness. His plea for the humanising influence of alcohol is as indubitably sincere as Mr. Chesterton's. It is, rather, that the battle here fought over again was fought, for most of us, at an earlier date; and it was in the eighteen-nineties rather than in the present century that, as Mr. Holbrook Jackson writes, 'Life-tasting was the fashion, and the rising generation felt as if it were stepping out of the cages of convention and custom into a wider freedom of tremendous possibilities.' The suggestion was made, satirically perhaps, that a truer picture of the 1910 attitudes would show us earnest youngsters at home, reading and discussing Nietzsche, rudely interrupted by the boring return of the parents bursting with hilarious reminiscences of Mr. George Robey from the local music-hall; but the fact remains that Houghton was an exact observer, and in this play recorded what, in his own immediate environment, he saw; and the narrower sort of Nonconformist, who perceives in the smaller varieties of wild oats only the manifestations of original sin, is extant in other places besides the suburbs of Manchester.

The Master of the House, written just after *The Younger Generation,* in December 1909, preceded it

in production in September 1910. As an experiment in the gruesome it is interesting, but not wholly successful, because—again to quote Mr. C. E. Montague—'one felt, or might feel, as if one climatic thrill had come, hesitated for a moment about its own finality, and then decided to go on and improve on itself—which it does, only that one has that sense of a slight check, an intermission and then a renewal of tension, and not a continuous cumulation of shiversome grimness.' It is, that is to say, a little faulty in technique. Houghton himself dissented, and rated this play high amongst his works, holding the acting responsible for the sense of check midway —a view to some extent confirmed by the play's superior effectiveness when, later on, the part of Fred Ovens was played, both in England and America, by Mr. Whitford Kane. A French translation of this play was made by M. Louis Pennequin.

Houghton records that his next play, a four-act 'light comedy,' really a farce, entitled *Ginger*, occupied him for the, in his case, unusually long time of ten months—from March to December 1910. It is a play for which he came to have a deep dislike, and, apart from his own view, is properly excluded from the present edition, for it is essentially a *pièce de théâtre*. Abundantly entertaining in action, as its production in 1913 by Mr. Esmé Percy proved, it is written with a single eye to theatrical effect, and has consequently no literary interest beyond showing once again how exactly fitted to the requirements of

the theatre was the Houghton dialogue, even when he was content to put his words into the mouths, for the most part, of stock characters. The play is in the atmosphere of Mr. Wells' *Kipps*: the scene is London, where at that time Houghton had not lived, and the aristocratic persons at any rate are not drawn from life. Ginger himself is a delight in the hands of an actor content to keep him within bounds—a universal type, vulgar, good-natured, a bounder with a heart of gold and an education picked up at the music-halls. The second act has an ingenious setting behind a stall at a bazaar, and the third is on the stage extravagantly funny. If the third act, exploring as it does the comic possibilities of kippers, is in one sense on a lower plane than the acrid comedy of *The Dear Departed*, in another what is lost in art is gained in geniality.

If 1910 was comparatively a barren year, 1911 was to make amends. In March he wrote *The Fifth Commandment*, a one-act play, which has not been performed in England, though it had in 1913 a run at the Little Theatre, Chicago. It was, as a matter of fact, accepted for production by Miss Horniman, but withdrawn at the author's request, because he had since written, in *The Perfect Cure*, a long play on the same subject. This use of a one-act play as a sort of studio-sketch for a future full-length version occurs also in the case of *Fancy Free* and *Partners*.

Fancy Free, also written in March 1911, holds a

curiously important place amongst Houghton's plays. It was first produced in Manchester by Mr. Iden Payne in November 1911, and fell flat, both with audience and Press. 'Except for a slight touch of jauntiness,' said the *Manchester Guardian* critic, 'which pervades the treatment, not very happily, the author gives us a rather cold, dry, impersonal representation of two men and two women morally not far removed from a state of canine promiscuity.' The play, however, was to survive its Manchester reception, and, by the accidental coincidence of its appearance at the Tivoli Music-hall on the night after the Stage Society's production of *Hindle Wakes*, played a great part in establishing Houghton's success. A man who could appeal to audiences so different as those of the Stage Society and the Tivoli Music-hall plainly had powers no longer to be ignored. To quote a critic of different opinion from that of the *Manchester Guardian*: 'It is,' said the *Evening Standard*, 'a little gem, and it has all the elfin grace, the elusiveness, the unexpected turnings of Oscar Wilde.' It is perhaps best to regard it as the brilliant indiscretion of a man not yet old enough to have outgrown a wish sometimes to *épater le bourgeois*. From February to June 1913 *Fancy Free* was the principal item in a triple bill which held the stage of the Princess' Theatre, New York.

Partners, the full-length version of *Fancy Free*, was written during May to September 1911. It has not been acted, and possibly, when it comes to be,

the last act will be found a little long. Here it appears without alteration.

Before completing *Partners* Houghton was already meditating *Hindle Wakes*, and, in sending *Partners* immediately on completion to a friend, wrote of his scheme for the new play as a settled thing. Not always did Houghton's titles, in the event so happily chosen, come so early to him. *Hindle Wakes* was, from the first line in the penny notebook, *Hindle Wakes*. Sometimes he had a long and anxious search for an apt title. *The Younger Generation*, for instance, gave him much trouble, and was finally used only by the courtesy of Miss Netta Syrett, who had written a one-act play of the same name.

Hindle Wakes was written in the October, November, and December of 1911, and completed well before the Christmas of that year. It was offered to Miss Horniman, and at once accepted for production in Manchester during the following autumn. Meantime, Houghton was content to wait, but he offered the play rather casually to at least one London manager, who declined it on the grounds, just enough, that he could not hope to cast it properly in London. It is also worth mentioning that *Hindle Wakes* was offered to the Liverpool Repertory Theatre, and, though recommended for production by their then adviser, Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie, declined as being too strong meat for the Liverpool public. In June 1912, however, Miss Horniman's company was giving a repertoire season at the Coronet Theatre, and she

was asked by the Stage Society to provide the last production of their thirteenth season, the play to be new and preferably Lancashire. *Hindle Wakes* was the obvious choice. Its production took place at the Aldwych Theatre on 16th June 1912: it was produced by Mr. Lewis Casson, Miss Horniman's then director, who found in realistic plays the best expression of his art, and acted by that wonderful 'Miss Horniman's company,' which, as a result of its success in this play, was shortly to suffer severe loss, in some cases temporary, in *personnel*. Never, perhaps, have the dramatic critics lavished upon a new man's play such praise as they bestowed on *Hindle Wakes*, and it was plain that the matter could not rest with the two performances before the Stage Society. Mr. Cyril Maude offered a home at the Playhouse, and there, through a desperately hot summer, *Hindle Wakes* was played until in September Mr. Maude required the Playhouse for himself, and the run was concluded, to houses increasingly crowded, at the Court Theatre. In Manchester, where it was played in November 1912, its success was immediate, and new box-office records were set up at the Gaiety Theatre. The subsequent career was exceptional: through 1913 five companies played *Hindle Wakes* in the provinces, breaking records at many theatres in Lancashire and Yorkshire. In December 1912 it was produced by Mr. William Brady at the Maxine Elliott Theatre, New York, where, in spite of the acting of Mr. Herbert

Lomas as Nathaniel Jeffcote, an otherwise ill-chosen cast was responsible for its failure. In February 1913, however, with a reconstructed cast, still including Mr. Lomas, it proved so successful at the small Fine Arts Theatre, Chicago, that it was transferred for an extended run to a large theatre, the Olympic. The total number of performances from its first production to the time of Houghton's death is 1838. Recent developments include arrangements for its production in South Africa and Egypt and at Copenhagen.

Eulogy makes dull reading. It is sufficient here to repeat that the London Press rang with praise, not only after the Stage Society's production, but again upon the reappearance at the Playhouse when the interval of a few weeks might have afforded opportunity for second thoughts. While, however, nobody denied the brilliantly entertaining qualities of the play, its critical reception in the city for which it was written was comparatively cold. Houghton himself welcomed the change. He was, then as always, an excellent critic of himself, and was secretly more amused than deluded by the deluge of London's praise. That he had written a play which entertained was all he asked to know. He would agree that 'every one of the characters is a piece of authentic life,' but would smile to be told by Mr. J. T. Grein that 'it is of value in these days of the battle of the sexes. It heralds the movement of the future.' He had no ambition to be a 'revolutionary,' a 'daring

thinker,' and the like. But the pendulum in Manchester swung back too far. True, as a picture of manners, the play could hardly astonish there as in London. That the manners were veracious was taken for granted. Manchester trusted Houghton for that, merely confirmed its belief, and passed on to consider what after all came second in the play. The masterly first act was left alone. The thunderstorm, perhaps, was enigmatic. Enigmatic it remains. Houghton knew the theatre too well not to be aware that stage-thunder is always thunder of the stage, and as a symbol the storm is too crude to be acceptable. Then, there was no baby, which was held to be cowardly. Then, the play broke down in the second act, whereas in truth the play escapes breakdown. The squeak, by reason of the disappointing Alan-Beatrice scene, is narrow, but there is no breaking down. Then, Fanny is a point of view and not a human being—which is a criticism only those ignorant of the economically independent mill-girl could pass. Then, the people not only spoke Lancashire and (which was admirable) thought it, but (which was culpable) spoke their thoughts aloud. There is truth in this last point, but the thing was probably deliberate and is certainly defensible. Without here entering upon a discussion of the limitations of realism, this much may be argued as a point of technique. The soliloquy is inadmissible in realistic plays, and the soliloquy, wrongly employed in its simpler form merely to carry on the action, was

rightly used by the older dramatists as a vehicle for philosophy and psychology. Most of Shakespeare's philosophy occurs in the soliloquies. Houghton wanted to reveal motive, to get a little more beneath the surface than was possible through superficial realistic dialogue. This 'thinking aloud' seems a considered attempt to embody in dialogue the uses of soliloquy. If one speaker shows to another more of his mind than, naturalistically considered, is wholly probable, the loss in absolute realism is compensated by the gain, not otherwise attainable, in clarifying for an audience the motives of the characters. Realism is in any case a compromise. The point for the dramatist to ask himself is not 'exactly how in these circumstances will such a character naturally speak?' but 'how must I make him speak in order to convey to an audience both his meaning and his motive?' If the audience is to share the dramatist's psychological vision of his characters, this 'thinking aloud' is essential. It is a virtue, not a blemish, in the play.

Hindle Wakes is the result of absolutely sincere observation. There occur in its original script none of those alterations for the worse to which, in other plays, reference has been made. It represents at his best a remarkable technical artist, not yet as highly sensitive as with years he would have been, but enormously sensitised, and a writer of dialogue unsurpassed in his generation. In the peculiar fitness which characterised its London production it owed, un-

doubtedly, a debt to its producer, Mr. Lewis Casson, and to the acting of Miss Horniman's company; but its signal success in the provinces not only shows those despised territories capable of appreciating a play which intrigued London's critics more than London's public, but demonstrates *Hindle Wakes*, in spite of the New York failure, a play which is absolutely 'actor-proof.'

After *Hindle Wakes* Houghton wrote in collaboration, as a kind of busman's holiday, a light farce, which has not been acted; and, for the first six months of 1912, took, partly deliberately, partly through ill-health, a complete rest from writing. After taking leave of the cotton trade he wrote, before quitting Manchester, a play in ten days. One is not certain that this play *The Perfect Cure* bears any manifest signs of hurry. With the knowledge that it was, in fact, so rapidly written, one can, no doubt, discover them; but when the impulse to write comes to a mind already excited by unusual events words pour out in a sudden spate, and delay is dangerous. In the event the fate of *The Perfect Cure* was disastrous. It was produced in June 1913 by Mr. Charles Hawtrey and withdrawn after four nights. With the exception of Mr. Hawtrey, Houghton considered it badly cast, and had a strong affection for the play, whose technical cleverness, if only in carrying through three acts with four characters, is considerable, and whose geniality is only to be compared with that of the third act of *Ginger*. The play

has toured the provinces under Mr. E. T. Heys as a subsidiary enterprise to the same manager's *Hindle Wakes* companies.

There remain to be noted three plays which Houghton wrote on commission for Mr. Arthur Bourchier. *Phipps* was written in September 1912, *Pearls* in October, and *Trust the People* between October and December. Of the two one-act plays it is enough to say that for plays written on commission there is but one standard for criticism, and that the success standard. *Phipps* was acted by Mr. Bourchier at the Garrick Theatre in November 1912, has been produced by Mr. Iden Payne in Chicago, and is to be given in New York; *Pearls*, which was designed expressly for the music-halls, was successfully acted by Mr. Bourchier and Miss Violet Vanbrugh at the Coliseum and other music-halls. Houghton made no higher claim for *Pearls* than that it met a case, but that it did successfully meet the case of the music-halls was distinctly a feather in his cap. Other dramatists have sometimes condescended to the music-halls, to find themselves rebuffed. Houghton adapted himself to their peculiar demand, and made a success.

Trust the People was produced at the Garrick Theatre on 6th February 1913, and ran for forty-four nights. Its failure was excused on the grounds of hurried writing. Mr. John Palmer, in his excellent book on *The Future of the Theatre*, has a slightly different theory. 'Mr. Stanley Houghton,' he writes,

'an amateur of the stage in Manchester (an amateur in the sense that Congreve was an amateur), wrote two plays already celebrated in the immediately recent history of the English theatre. These two plays were Mr. Houghton's sincere contributions to English drama—written without thought of the public.

'The next we heard of Mr. Houghton was that he had come to London, and that he was writing a play for Mr. Arthur Bourchier. He was no longer an amateur writing to please himself. He was a professional author writing for an audience at the Garrick Theatre. Mr. Houghton's new play contained everything the public is supposed to like. All the ingredients of a really popular play were handled with quite an astonishing neatness and dexterity. But in vain was the net spread. The public would not be caught. Mr. Houghton being a man of quick perception saw that it was a mistake to get into touch with the English public: that nothing pleases it so much as to be ignored. It was soon reported that he had gone away to Paris to forget what the English public was like.'

There is more to be said for this view than for the explanation that the play failed because it was rapidly written. Houghton spent as long over *Trust the People* as over *Hindle Wakes*, and longer by a month than over *The Younger Generation*. Nor did he, as with *The Perfect Cure*, blame the acting, which he thought good, and in the case of Mr. Bourchier

superlatively good. He blamed the play. The simple fact is that *Trust the People* is a sick man's work. Long before production Houghton had discounted it, and one is only following his own desires in excluding the play from the present edition. 'The platitudes of depreciation,' wrote Mr. Monkhouse, 'were inevitable, but nobody who knew Houghton had any fear that he was at the end of the tether, or near it. He was neither overcome nor soured, and if his prospects were momentarily overclouded, he had yet an abundance of present accomplishment and fine prospects.'

Writing of Houghton's plays in the *British Review* Mr. Edward Storer said: 'Even the most irresponsible of them has a definite intellectual notion entangled in it somewhere. There is the presentment of an awakened intelligence behind all this rough movement of ugly middle-class Lancashire life, a curiosity, a sense of youth. . . . In vigour of plot and action he is quite the equal of many older English playwrights whom it would be indiscreet to mention. It will be very interesting to see what this playwright will do when he comes to town, so to speak. In one sense he has, of course, already come to town, but so far he has not given us a play which shows that he is capable of an artistic representation of metropolitan life as rounded as he has given us in the dramas of the fertile but savage North.'

In Mr. Storer's sense Houghton was not come to town, and one doubts if he ever wished to come.

He glanced at London, and went to live in Paris. Certainly he had no immediate intention of representing 'metropolitan life.' The novel he had begun was about Manchester. He made in Paris notes of two plays, a country house comedy and a Lancashire play. Lancashire interested Houghton; London did not. He had, one feels perfectly certain, no wish to 'come to town,' but he had, beyond doubt, an unexpressed desire to do for Manchester what Mr. Arnold Bennett had done for the Potteries; and one hardly thinks Mr. Storer would deny that Mr. Bennett came to town.

The word 'genius' was freely used of Houghton even in organs of opinions so opposite as the *Times* and the *English Review*. Let it be here admitted that genius is of two kinds. There is the heaven-born genius, leaping almost at once to full maturity, finding its commonest expression in lyric poetry; and the self-made genius, for whom was invented the tag about 'an infinite capacity for taking pains.' Houghton's was genius in the making, not fully wrought to its finest point, but leaving behind it, far more than promise, achievement, of which Mr. E. A. Baughan could write, 'Houghton's technique is superior to Pinero's,' and Mr. Storer could sum up by saying, 'He has, first of all, the dramatist's mind. He is more concerned with the action of his play than with anything else, and that is the great thing.'

Houghton was a first-rate technical artist, which may be a smaller thing than an intellectual or a

temperamental artist, but implies the complete mastery of the craftsmanship a man must have if he is to give full expression to the riper experience of his maturity, either on the intellectual or the temperamental plane. He had, behind acquired technique, the naturally 'seeing eye,' powers of clear observation, exceptional in themselves, trained by constant practice till they amounted to genius. An observer selects. When Mr. Archer wrote of *The Younger Generation* that Houghton 'does not throw in any poetry,' he stated of that play what is universally true of Houghton's dramatic work. He observed life from the comic writer's point of view, which is not the poet's. For his art not the beauty of life, but the absurdities and hypocrisies of daily existence, were the targets of his aim. His art needs no apology, but the humane beauty of certain of the *Manchester Guardian* sketches had yet found no expression in the plays. That with time it would have come is not to be questioned.

HAROLD BRIGHOUSE.