

# THE AMAZING AND VERSATILE BARNEYS OF WASHINGTON

An Undraped Statue on Their Lawn Has Thrown Into the Lime-Light a Family Whose Talents and Unconventionalities Keep Society in the National Capital in Constant Expectation.



Mrs. Barney in Her Costume as an Egyptian Princess, One of Her Many Remarkable Gowns.

**A**N undraped statue on the lawn brought the Barney family of Washington into international notoriety in a day. Yet for years the members of this remarkable household have kept the National Capital in a state of constant expectancy.

They are more than a family, these Barneys; they are an issue.

Whenever a select and exclusive group of the smart set gathers about the dining table, and the flow of nimble wit, sent sparkling on its way with the advent of the oyster, and degenerating into a sluggish stream of inane platitudes with the arrival of the entree, is sinking, lifeless, into a pool of silence with the incoming of the ice, the watchful hostess, unflinching by the critical situation, reaches back into that convulsion of her brain marked "Emergency" and, drawing forth, deftly tosses into the centre of the table this conversational bombshell:

"What do you really think of the Barneys?"

Then she leans back, smiling comfortably, while her guests lock horns and silence flees.

"They are poseurs, learned only in the stale devices of studied eccentricity!" exclaims a beribboned member of a legation.

"Nonsense!" hotly replies a famous engineer, "it is genius scorning the narrow conventionalities of society."

"Genius nothing!" interrupts a scientist with seven letters after his name, "the veriest tyro in art or literature or ethics would laugh at the Barneys' pretensions. They fool nobody but the simple minded."

"What but genius could ever show such remarkable versatility in every branch of art as Mrs. Barney has exhibited in the last ten years?" puts in a literary woman who boasts that she positively refuses to write for the newspapers.

"And what but oddity and freakishness would build a quarter-of-a-million dollar house and not put a bed in it!" exclaims the practical wife of a Cabinet officer.

Yes, silence has departed thence. For the Barneys, themselves of the ultra-fashionable set in Washington, furnish a perennial subject of heated debate in that city, no matter when or where the Barney name is mentioned.

Nor is this confined to the higher levels of society, for the Barneys are the best-known people in social Washington, and that is a unique distinction unappreciated by those who are condemned to a life outside the National Capital. To be known in Washington at all one must be well known everywhere else, and to be well known there one must have a National reputation. Members of the Cabinet, Senators and those of corresponding grade are languidly recognized by the native Washingtonian, but a Member of the House would hardly be put in the census. Washington folks are used to big ones in every line.

So, when, as is admitted by those who know their Washington, the Barneys stand at the head of the list of notables, it behooves those who would

Miss Laura Barney in Her Bahai Costume.

know of the capital to know of the Barney family.

Not only do the wealthy dwellers in the sacred precincts of Dupont Circle and the surrounding districts, the abode of those with fame and fortune, dispute concerning this interesting family, its unconventionalities, its offshootings into all that is unique and oblique, and its general indifference to the world's opinion, but the humblest boarding-house keeper will confide, as a special favor to the grocery man, what she really thinks on the subject; and it is odds that the grocery man will attempt to modify her views by telling her what the man who brought the bread said about it yesterday morning.

Now there, be these three: Laura, Natalie, and Mrs. Barney; but the greatest of these is Mrs. Barney.

For talent, eccentricity, genius, oddity, idealism of the loftiest, practicalness of the shrewdest, deep sympathy with human kind in all its phases, especially in its suffering, and yet absolute, cold-blooded indifference to what this same human kind may have to say or think of her and her doings, charity that welcomes the humblest, and yet haughty aloofness that holds off the proudest at arms length—for all this and these, there is none in the whole country to compare with Mrs. Albert Clifford Barney, artist, author, musician, religious enthusiast, sculptor, poetess, architect, playwright, actress, dancer, business woman, and philanthropist.

No wonder a woman as versatile as that is talked about!

Mrs. Barney is a native of Cincinnati. Her father was the founder and wealthy owner of the famous Pike's Theatre. Although a belle in the leading society coterie of her youthful days, she nevertheless found time to write and stage, for charity's sake, many a well-written play. She was author, stage manager, and actress in these early excursions of her genius, and, her

father discerning her talent, sent her abroad to cultivate it. On the way she discovered another talent, that of the artist, and while abroad studied with great success under that odd American genius, Whistler.

On her return to America, she married Mr. Barney, a wealthy financier of Ohio, and, when he died several years ago, their combined fortunes amounted to about ten million dollars, the half of which came to her, while the balance went to her two daughters, Laura and Natalie, in their own right. Each of the family is thus wealthy on her own account, and conducts her private financial affairs wholly distinct from the others.

About ten years ago the family removed their residence to Washington. Mr. Barney's death occurred a few years after. Mrs. Barney who, with her daughters, had even then become a prominent member of society as well as a leader in artistic and charitable circles, then went abroad for several years, roaming hither and yon over the countries of the globe, now studying art in Paris or Italy, now exploring unknown Asia.

So widely had her talent as an artist expanded that Mrs. Barney, at this time, won the distinction of having several of her paintings hung "upon the line" in the Paris Salon for a number of years.

It was on this extended visit, and

while the Barneys were in Asia, that they became acquainted with the cult of Bahaiism. Miss Laura Barney, especially, became an enthusiastic devotee—of which later.

On the return Mrs. Barney, ripened into knowledge and indifference to the world's opinion, addressed herself to many things that at once brought her into the spot-light of notoriety. The Bahai religion, or cult rather, which languished in America with but a few half-hearted members, was, through her efforts and by her enthusiasm and purse, rapidly brought to a healthful growth. As the real founder of the sect in America, she and her daughter Laura have always been the acknowledged heads and leaders, especially in Washington, where for some years it was quite the proper thing, from a social standpoint, to be interested in this latest product of Oriental abstraction.

Plunging at the same time into the work of practical charity, Mrs. Barney founded the Neighborhood House, an institution that has been productive of a world of good to the needy and unfortunate of Washington. Her interest in this did not consist merely in asking the amount of money needed and reaching for checkbook. Despite a score of other active interests that would have engrossed the time of half a dozen less energetic women, she gave the closest personal supervision to the work, and even after it had been fairly and suc-



Mrs. Barney in a Spanish Costume.



Miss Laura Barney Posing in the Home Studio as the Heroine of Her Play, "God's Heroes."



Bust of Miss Natalie Barney, Made by Her Sister.

cessfully launched she still kept watch over it—and does to this day.

Blending her histrionic instincts with her desire to assist the poor, Mrs. Barney at that time commenced a series of entertainments in aid of her charities at the local theatres. These consisted of plays, pantomimes, and like theatrical efforts, all the product of her pen. They were all successful from a financial as well as a literary point of view, for Mrs. Barney marshaled all of wealthy Washington society at her beck and marched them to the box office!

As works of art, these excursions of

hers into the dramatic field were, at the time, pronounced by many dramatic critics as worthy of high praise.

In several of these Mrs. Barney herself appeared, generally in the leading rôles, one in particular which aroused a vast deal of comment, wherein she appeared in the costume of a Greek girl or nymph, and, with nearly half a century of years behind her, danced to music of her own composition various dances of an entirely original order. These dances, she explained, were educational as well as entertaining, invented, or rather created, by her, she announced, to teach the young American girl grace and beauty of movement.

And all the while this remarkable woman, in addition to numberless other time-consuming interests in business or society, was doing a full day's work six days in the week painting! Her specialty in this line was portraits, and during that period she painted the portraits of scores of sitters, among them Bernard Shaw, Whistler, her one-time teacher, and Mrs. Patrick Campbell—these in odd hours of her little runs to Europe.

She also did some creditable work in sculpture at times of leisure or in time filched from other work.

As a side line—one of a dozen—this remarkable woman also turned her talent for color combination to use in the line of invention, discovering, after much experimenting, a novel method of blending in the dyeing of cloth. The rights to this invention she made over to the women and children of Neighborhood House, one of her favorite charities, which had, under her supervision, grown large enough to occupy two spacious houses she had bought for that purpose; here a large number of persons to-day render themselves self-supporting by following her methods of dyeing.

These multiple interests, however, as well as the conduct of her vast estate, were all subordinate to the building of the "Studio House," as she calls it, commenced about seven years ago. Through this she first became widely known as an eccentric. When abroad she had collected everything artistic and odd which met her eye until she had enough to stock a dozen curio shops.

Reversing the ordinary custom of building a house and then furnishing it in accordance with the general artistic tone and design, she reversed processes, bought her curios, bric-a-brac, and antiques from Dublin to Peking, and then set out to build a house around them. The result was the "Studio House." It is located on Sheridan Circle, the most fashionable district in newer Washington, handsome but unassuming, and in its exterior offers no hint of the eccentricities within.

Fearing that no architect could embody in wood and stone the ideas she had wrought out, she became her own architect; further, after designing the structure, she became her own contractor, and personally saw to the selection of every bit of material that went into it. There is not a door knob or paneling, or a unique bit of wood or metal designing that she did not work out herself, often going to the shops and standing over the machinist, instructing him in every particular of his work.

In decorating the walls which were to serve as a background for the wealth of rich tapestries and hangings she had procured abroad, she donned the painter's blouse and, getting in among them, mixed every dab of paint that went in,

(Continued on Page 8.)



Mrs. Barney in One of Her Own Plays.





# THE AMAZING AND VERSATILE BARNEYS OF WASHINGTON



(Continued from Page 1.)

combining the colors with as much care as though she were painting a difficult portrait.

Thus from cellar to garret she constructed the house, her personality standing out in every form and shade of it. The rooms, passages, and halls were built solely with an eye to setting off the curios, hence they are of a nature to bewilder the ordinary mortal.

The flooring for the ground and second stories, as well as the connecting staircases, are made of ordinary house brick—why brick instead of wood does not appear. On the second floor is a large room, specifically called the "studio" to distinguish it from other rooms (although that is the name given the entire building.)

This room, where Mrs. Barney does her painting, is filled with the most curious of her antique finds; it also overflows with innumerable fat images of Buddha, who, in the Bahai belief, has some considerable standing as a deity. There is an ancient Spanish arch with the supporting pillars, which while old enough to be interesting, looks most ludicrously out of place thus cribbed in by a modern house.

In the main hall a handsome marble altar, taken from some old Italian church, forms the mantel; there are columns of jade from the Orient, couches from Pompeii, vases gathered from all over the earth—in short, a wilderness of things that used-to-be, but which have outlived their usefulness by several centuries and now serve to make art dealers rich. There is a world of treasure in the way of tapestries, costly marbles, and priceless curios—and there is not a bed in the house!

Following the manner of living adopted by the Greeks in the golden age of Pericles, the Barney family takes its repose upon wooden couches made, of course, under Mrs. Barney's eye for that purpose.

The most startling thing about the whole whimsical building is that, although Mrs. Barney is essentially feminine in her tastes, she would not permit a single closet to be built in the "Studio."

Despite the difficulties of life under such a conglomeration of conditions, ancient, mediæval, and modern, the Barneys, when in this country, make the "Studio" their home, and appear

to extract as much satisfaction out of it as the new millionaire in his modern house.

Mrs. Barney has, by her will, bequeathed the whole of this aggregation of the ages, together with the house that holds it, to the city of Washington; the use it is to be put to is not specified, but left to bother the Commissioners of some future day.

The opening of "Studio House" was celebrated in a manner characteristic of its eccentric builder. Though occupying a position in the front rank of Washington society, Mrs. Barney passed by her friends of the purple and invited to a combination of reception and banquet only the workmen who had taken active part in building this realization of her ideals. Here, while she discoursed to them on the beauties of the ideal life, the charm of surrounding one's self with beautiful and costly curios and trappings, and urged them one and all to go and do likewise, and thus live in a loftier, nobler, more ideal atmosphere, the workmen addressed themselves sedulously to the rare viands she had prepared for them.

The result of this attempt to uplift the humble artisan may be gathered from the impression of one of the stone masons:

"It was a great feed the old lady set out," he said, "but there was a lot of foolish food I was afraid to tackle. I couldn't get my hooks into the talk she was giving us about the junk she'd dug up somewhere and stacked up around the house, but she seemed to think a lot of it. Maybe she likes that sort of thing, but, to tell the truth, I'd rather been back in my cottage with the kids a-tumbling over me and Lizzie wrestling with the frying beef-steak for dinner."

Mrs. Barney, as mentioned, is the head and front of the Bahais in America. The cult—for its devotees do not call it a religion—was started about fifty years ago by a Persian named Bab—and calling himself the Voice—who proclaimed himself as a modern John the Baptist, the forerunner of one greater to come.

Later on, when Bab had been gathered to his fathers, a nobleman of that country proclaimed himself as the Expected One, and coming forward in this rôle began to preach a new religion. He taught that Abraham, Moses,

Christ, Mahomet, and himself were all earthly manifestations of God. His name was Baha Ullah. He sent letters to the Pope and all the crowned heads of Europe demanding obeisance and belief in him, and threatening all manner of disasters to such as did not obey. These disasters, the Bahais claim, have all been fulfilled.

Baha Ullah, becoming involved in the difficulties that beset all founders of religions, was killed, and his son, Abdul Baha, succeeded to his mantle. He fled from Persia to escape persecution, and is now living at Acre in Syria, surrounded by his devotees. He is believed by his followers to be like his father, the Manifestation. The ethics of the religion are said to be of a high

order, and the mode of living as prescribed, blameless. However, polygamy is taught.

Under Mrs. Barney's nourishing hand the sect was planted in America, and has thriven, especially in Washington. It now embraces several hundred in number in that city, some of them persons of prominence in affairs. They have a place of worship on fashionable Connecticut Avenue, leased for them by Mrs. Barney, and here they hold their meetings each Friday evening. They are enthusiastic propagandists and expect shortly to cover the earth with their New Dispensation.

Mrs. Barney's literary work is almost entirely in the form of the drama. Her best-known plays are "About Thebes,"

a play woven around life in that ancient city, and the "Man in the Moon," a pantomime, filled, it is said, with interesting and fantastic whimsicalities. It has been much praised by the critics—although this probably lent no value to it in the author's eyes.

Several years ago she gave an exhibition of more than a score of her paintings at the Corcoran Art Gallery in Washington, an exhibition that was highly successful; but there now remains no picture of hers to the public view but a portrait in the same gallery, which has often been mistaken for a portrait of herself, but is, in fact, one painted by her of a friend, the only clew to whose identity is the single name "Bertha."

Inheriting from her father the dramatic instinct, Mrs. Barney is fond of acting, especially in rôles that call for rich costuming. She has numberless rich costumes, designed from the dress of ancient and modern nations, and in these she loves to array herself and pose for the pleasure of her friends. One, a costume of an Egyptian Princess, is especially gorgeous.

True daughters of their mother are Laura and Natalie Barney. It is the former who is the most enthusiastic of the family as a Bahaiist. Several years ago she went to Acre and remained in the household of Abdul Baha, the Manifestation, for more than two years, sounding the deepest depths and scaling the loftiest heights of the divine one's teaching. She returned more enthusiastically devout than ever, and announced her intention of devoting the remainder of her life to spreading the gospel of Abdul Baha.

Under the inspiration of her religious belief, Miss Barney has written and will publish within the month a drama founded upon the cult of Bahaiism. The scene is laid in Persia, the first being in a rose garden of Teheran. The heroine, "Quarratul-'Ain's," is a believer in Bahaiism, and, owing to the fanatical hatred of the Mohammedans for her creed, she loses her life in martyrdom. It is a bold literary attempt, this of setting forth in drama the inception of a new religion, but Miss Barney is said to have handled the subject with the talent and genius necessary to make it a success.

She was educated in France, where she also studied dramatic art under the best teachers of the Théâtre Français in Paris, where she is at present residing. She is a noted linguist, mastering, among others, the difficult Persian language that she might more readily understand the teachings of Abdul Baha.

Until the death of the eminent French author, Catalle Mendes, he was a great friend and admirer of Miss Barney, and was at the time of his tragic taking off engaged in writing a play in which this beautiful young Baha poetess was the heroine.

Like her mother, Miss Barney is talented in the arts of sculpture and painting, but, it is said, will lay aside all these to concentrate her efforts on literary work for the good of the Bahaiist propaganda. The form of the book

itself, aside from its literary contents, was designed by the author, and will be a most artistic production, the binding and border being handsomely ornamented with symbolic Persian designs and each page being illuminated in original Oriental coloring. It will be handsomely illustrated with engravings from original photographs. Those representing the heroine are from original photographs of Miss Barney herself, who posed in costume for them in the private studio of an amateur friend in Washington for the purpose of these illustrations.

Miss Natalie Barney, while not as marked in her personality as her mother and sister, still has all the original characteristics of the family, being at one with them in all their cults of art and religion. Altogether, it is a unique family; one standing out in bold relief even in a city like Washington, which is filled with all that is out of the commonplace.

The whole family has been recently brought again into the lime-light of publicity through a nude statue which was executed some years ago by Miss Laura Barney in Paris. This was recently sent to Washington from that city, where all the family are now temporarily resident, with instructions to be placed in the front yard of the "Studio" home. The statue was made the sport of godless small boys, and the Chief of the Washington police ordered it draped with a sheet.

Rumor, which had birth heaven knows where, then proclaimed that it was a statue of Miss Natalie Barney, who had posed for it at her sister's studio in Paris. This, reaching the ears of the Barneys in Paris, evoked a storm of angry protests and denials from all members of the family, who, in dispatches to the American press, denied that Miss Natalie had posed for all or any part of the work of art, and declared that the original of the statue was a professional model of Paris.

It now transpires that the rumor, so cruelly painful to the high-strung family, originated through the resemblance many acquaintances of the Barneys saw between the face of the statue and the countenance of Miss Natalie Barney. Many of these insist that the likeness is as perfect as art can make it, and hold the opinion that Miss Laura Barney modeled the bust of her sister and placed it upon the figure of the Parisian model.